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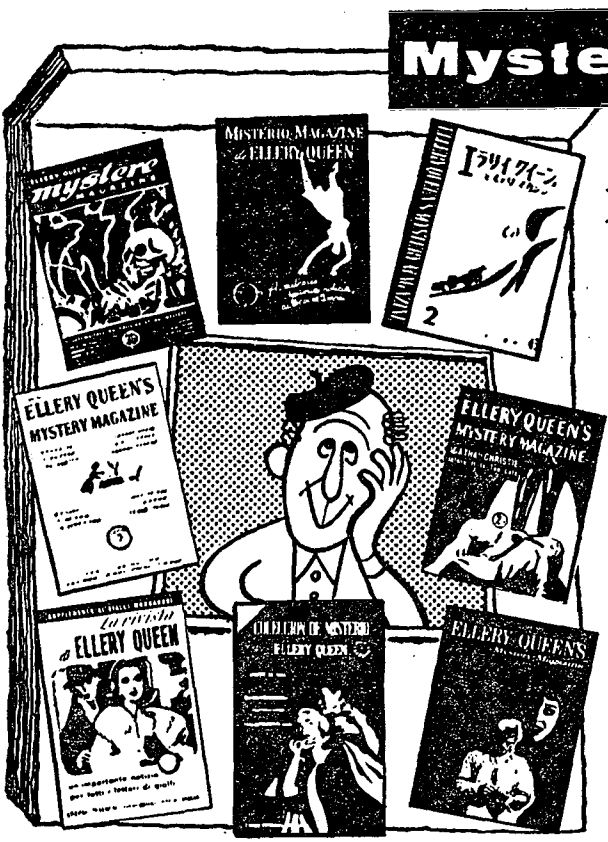

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a new story by

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN**
TITLE:	***Murder in a Motel***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVES:	Dr. Coffee and Lieutenant Ritter
LOCALE:	Northbank, United States
COMMENTS:	*Lieutenant Ritter for the police – legwork and bulldoggedness; Dr. Coffee for science – the medical facts and the microscope . . . working together in The Case of the Old Flame and the Jealous and Suspicious Wife.*

HIS HAND WAS SHAKING SO BADLY that he had a little trouble fitting his key into the familiar lock. He paused, made sure his shoes were free of snow, and tried again. As he closed the door softly behind him, the cuckoo clock in the dining room hooted three times.

At the bottom of the stairs he listened for sounds that might give him a cue. There were none. The light shining through the open door of the bedroom meant nothing: his wife could be fast asleep over her book.

He negotiated each step cautiously, avoiding the three that he knew creaked. He stopped twice to look at his hand on the banister. It seemed steadier.

He paused again on the threshold of the bedroom. "Hello, darling. Still awake?"

The girl in bed gave him a quick diagnostic glance before she replied. She was a big wholesome-looking girl, almost as big as he was, and at least ten years younger. Her dark eyes held no challenge as they completed their tolerant appraisal. She put down her book, touched graceful fingers to the ends of her dark wavy hair, and smiled with friendly lips.

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"I was afraid I might have to help you to bed," she said at last, "but you seem fairly sober." She leaned back against her pillows. "Dull party?"

"As usual." He took off his coat, hoping she would not notice that his hands were trembling again. He undid his tie. "I hate stags."

"You poor martyr! Too bad you have only one liver to give to your country!" she said. Suddenly she sat up. "Fred! Where's your tie clasp?"

"My what?"

"The gold tie clasp I gave you for your birthday—with your initials in your own handwriting."

Fred looked down at the slight bulge above his belt. He thrust his hands into his pockets. He explored his coat now hanging on the back of a chair. Then he sank to the edge of the bed and buried his face in his hands.

"Oh, my God!" he said.

"Fred, what's wrong? Are you sick?"

He raised his eyes to hers. His Florida tan was a bilious olive-drab. His handsome dimples were deep death's-head hollows. He said, "Betty, I'm in a jam. I've been lying to you. There was no stag party tonight."

"Oh." Betty gripped the edge of the blankets. She suddenly seemed very much smaller. "Who was the woman?"

"Anne."

"Not Anne Ingersoll?" It was like a cry for help.

He nodded unhappily.

"Oh, Fred! Still?"

"Don't get me wrong, Betty. I hadn't seen her in over a year—not since we were married. She called me yesterday. She said she was in trouble and had to see me."

"But why *you*, Fred?"

"Not for auld lang syne, certainly. I guess she was desperate and thought I might know a doctor who could help her."

"And because you're a softie and a pigeon." Betty's lips were tight. "Because you can't say no. So what happened?"

"I met her for dinner. She was a little tight when I got there and we had a few more drinks. It was still snowing when we finished, so I didn't think she ought to drive. I got her to leave her car in the parking lot and drove her to the motel on the river road where she's been living. She insisted on one more drink—"

"And you put her to bed?" his wife interrupted.

"I did not. I still wanted to hear her story, since I'd lied to you to spend an evening with her, but she still wasn't making any sense. She was maudlin and hysterical by turns. I got her to lie down on the day bed and she dozed off. The snow had stopped. I thought I'd wait for an hour and see if she would sleep it off and then talk coherently.

"There was a gas heater going in the cabin and it was warm and

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stuffy. I took off my coat and loosened my collar and tie. I turned on the teevee—some silly quiz with neurotic females screaming as though they'd been attacked, instead of just winning a forty-foot cabin cruiser—and I guess I must have dozed off too. I woke up with a splitting headache. It was after two. Anne had fallen off the day bed. That's probably what woke me. She'd banged her face on the floor and her nose was bleeding a little. She didn't wake up when I lifted her back to the day bed. Then I noticed her face was very pink and I remembered what I'd read somewhere about gas poisoning. The heater was still burning, though.

"I opened all the windows and the front door. Anne was still out, but she was breathing. I put on my things and left by the kitchen door. I didn't wake the motel manager for obvious reasons. He'd stuck his head out of his office door when we drove in, and I didn't want him to get another look at me. There was nothing he could do for her anyhow. I drove off until I came to a roadside phone booth. I called the police and told them to send an ambulance—and to bring oxygen. And here I am. Should I have stayed? There was nothing more I could have done..."

Betty looked at him, half quizzical, half pitying. She shrugged.

"You don't believe me, do you, Betty?"

"I believe you," she said slowly. "But will anybody else—especially if she dies? You'd better go back for your tie clasp, Fred."

He jumped up to throw his arms around his wife. His rapidly tumbling words made no sense to the ear but they were perfectly intelligible to the heart. Betty Best opened her arms and her heart to her frightened husband.

"You *are* a sucker, Fred," she whispered. "Maybe that's why I love you."

The snow had not started again. The icy wind had swept away the last of the overcast and stars blazed in the predawn darkness. Traffic was beginning to grind down the crust that had formed over the snowy river road—milk trucks, newspaper vans, all-night buses, homing night-owls from the coffee pots and power stations, bound for their rustic nests.

When he saw the flashing neon lure of the Riverside Motel, Fred Best slowed down. He noticed that the lights were out in Cabin Ten, but that the motel office was ablaze. Several cars were parked outside the office. He saw no ambulance. They must have taken Anne away...

Fred Best turned boldly into the driveway, rolled to a stop in the parking space behind Cabin Ten. He cut his ignition, switched off his lights, and waited. Nothing happened. He took a flashlight from the glove compartment and moved

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silently to the back door of the cabin. The door was unlocked—as he had left it.

He crossed the kitchenette and stopped. He heard only the sound of his own breathing in the darkness. His thumb slid along the cold barrel of the flashlight, seeking the switch. But before he could press it, the room was flooded with sudden brightness.

Across the room a man stood with one hand on the wall button, the other gripping a revolver.

"Brody, Northbank Police," said the man. "What do you want?"

"I—I've come to see the lady who lives here," Fred Best said.

"She ain't home." The plain-clothes man leered. "But the lieutenant will talk to you instead. Come with me."

Several uniformed policemen eyed Fred Best as he walked into the motel office, a revolver pressed against his spine. A thin, dark, big-eared, sad-eyed man was sitting on the manager's desk. Something about him—either the way his felt hat was pulled down over one eye, or the air space between his outsize shirt collar and his outsize Adam's apple, or the unobtrusive air of authority—something about him spelled police. The manager was the halfback type, a handsome young red-head who was pacing the floor, his peacock-blue bathrobe catching the eye. Fred Best recognized him from the quick glimpse he had caught of his face at the office window when he drove Anne Ingersoll home after dinner—Good lord, was it only last night?

"This bird walked in the back door of Cabin Ten with a flashlight, Lieutenant," the plain-clothes man said. "Says he's a friend of that Ingersoll dame. He's clean."

"What's your name?" the Lieutenant asked.

"Frederick J. Best."

"You live in this motel?"

"I live in Northbank. I'm local branch manager for the Blue Caduceus Medical and Surgical Supplies Corporation." Fred Best noted that the motel manager was watching him quizzically.

"Ever see this guy before, Schaeffer?" The lieutenant nodded at Best.

"Yes, sir," the motel manager said, as if he had just made up his mind. "He's the man who came home with Miss Ingersoll last night. It was a little after ten."

"That true, Best?" the lieutenant asked.

Fred Best hesitated. If they had found his tie clasp, lying would only make matters worse. He said, "Yes, I brought Miss Ingersoll home last night."

"What happened then? You drive right off?"

Again Best hesitated.

"Maybe you can answer that one, Schaeffer," the lieutenant said.

"Why, yes, sir," said the motel manager. "He didn't drive off right

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away. He parked around in back of Cabin Ten and they both went inside. It sounded like they were having a fight. Anyhow, I heard a woman's voice yelling in there. I didn't hear any man's voice, but I could hear her hollering and screaming clear over here. I was just going over to investigate when the row stopped. I thought they'd made up or gone to bed or something, until—"

"Until what, Schaeffer?"

"Well, about two in the morning I heard a car start up and I looked out and saw this guy driving away. Then I noticed the lights on in Cabin Ten and all the windows and the front door open. I thought that was kind of funny in this weather, so I went over to take a look, and I found Miss Ingersoll out cold. She was all bruised and bleeding. She looked awful."

"Did you beat her up, Best?" the lieutenant asked.

"I did not. I didn't lay a hand on her."

"Didn't even notice she was out cold, I suppose."

"Of course I knew she was out. It was the gas heater. It must have been. That's why I opened the door and windows—"

"Before you sneaked off," said the lieutenant. "By the way, why did you come back? Just to see if you'd be recognized?"

"I didn't sneak off," Best insisted. "I went to call an ambulance."

"Say, there's one other thing, Lieutenant," the motel manager broke in. "I forgot to mention about this other woman in Cabin Ten."

"There was no other woman," Best declared.

"There sure was." The manager was talking to the lieutenant. "She drove up right after Mr. Best and Miss Ingersoll did, like she'd been following 'em. She parked her Volkswagen on the other side of the road and sat there for quite a while with her lights out. Then she walked across to Cabin Ten and looked in the window for maybe five minutes. Then she went in, but she came out again almost right away and drove off."

"What did this woman look like?"

"I couldn't see her very well from here, but I got a glimpse of her when she was standing in front of the window. She was tall and dark and she wore a fur coat and a red beret."

"That jog your memory any, Best?"

"The man's crazy! There was no such woman in Cabin Ten." Best spoke loudly, but there was no conviction in his voice. A spot of cold trickled along his spine. His wife was tall and dark and she wore a fur coat and sometimes a red beret; and she drove a Volkswagen. Of course there must be more than one tall brunette in Northbank with a fur coat, a red beret, and a Volkswagen. Besides, Betty had been home in bed. Or was it possible

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that Betty had been jealous and suspicious and had actually followed him? She could have come into Cabin Ten to check up, found Anne asleep on the day bed and Fred dozing in front of the television, and gone home again.

"Tell me, officer," Best said, "is Miss Ingersoll—? I mean, will she live?"

"Don't know yet." The lieutenant stood up. "Meanwhile let's you and me go downtown, Best. We got things to talk about."

Max Ritter, the youngest, swarthiest, skinniest, and homeliest lieutenant of detectives in the Northbank Police Department, stared at Betty Best across her fifth cup of coffee. She was still sticking to her story.

"Why should I have followed my husband?" she demanded.

"Jealousy makes wives do funny things, lady. Most women would get mighty suspicious if their husband spent the evening at a motel with an old flame. And this car you drive—"

"Look, Lieutenant, at least three friends of mine drive Volkswagens and I'm sure there must be dozens more in Northbank. Why don't you question them?"

"I guess that's what I'll have to do—unless you decide to cooperate."

"What more can I do, Lieutenant? I stayed home all evening. I trust my husband implicitly. He told me the whole story and I believe him completely. If I didn't, do you think I would have sent him back looking for his tie clasp, knowing he might run into you people since he himself called the police?"

"The motel manager says *he* called police," Max Ritter said. "Do you mind if I have a look around? Or do you want me to get a search warrant?"

"Help yourself, Lieutenant. I have *nothing* to hide."

Lieutenant Ritter walked directly from the breakfast nook to the hall closet, opened the door, felt the shoulders of the coats hanging there, then dropped to his knees and examined the clutter of rubbers, galoshes, and plastic overshoes. When he returned to Betty Best he was holding aloft, with perhaps just the slightest air of triumph, a pair of woman's galoshes.

"Funny thing," he said, "but the insteps are packed with wet cinders."

"That's funny?" asked Betty Best, drawing her flame-colored négligée closer around her.

"*Wet* cinders," repeated the detective.

"I'm not surprised. I ran some errands before dinner last evening."

"I noticed when I came in," Lieutenant Ritter went on, "that your sidewalk and front steps are sprinkled with salt. I also noticed a few hours ago that the steps and pathways at the Riverside Motel are sprinkled with cinders."

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"So what does that prove?"

"Nothing. May I take these galoshes along with me?"

"Of course. You'll release my husband this morning, I hope."

"I ain't sure," Max Ritter said. "I'm holding him till Miss Ingersoll comes out of her coma—so she can confirm or deny his story. Or till she dies. In that case, you'd be willing to take the stand, I guess, Mrs. Best? And submit to cross-examination?"

"On my husband's behalf?" Betty Best's lips were again tightly compressed. "Of course," she said softly.

Dr. Daniel Webster Coffee, chief pathologist and director of laboratories for Pasteur Hospital, unhooked his long legs from the rungs of his tall stool, raised his eyes from the twin lenses of his microscope, and barked at the rotund, pink-turbaned Hindu across the laboratory. "Dr. Mookerji, come here. Lend me your eyes and your tropical background. Am I looking at another case of schistosomiasis?"

The round brown resident pathologist, Calcutta's gift to Northbank on a medical scholarship, waddled to the microscope.

"Quite accurate diagnosis," he declared, as he twisted the focusing knob. "Am perceiving clutch of bilharzia eggs incubating in blood vessel. Patient is no doubt ex-G.I.?"

"Just what I've been saying," Dr. Coffee replied. "Our self-imposed job of policing the world is revolutionizing American medicine—and nobody seems aware of it. An airman goes swimming in an oriental pond and picks up trematodes that will live in his bloodstream for thirty years—if *they* let *him* live that long. The army and navy bring home diseases we never heard of twenty years ago, except in textbooks—loa-loa, Guinea worm, Ceylon mouth, kala-azar. We spend a million dollars or more launching a rocket that will fall into the sea, and we spend nickels bringing our doctors up to date on parisitology and tropical diseases so they'll recognize a case of—"

"Hi, doc!"

The pathologist was interrupted by the entrance of Lieutenant Max Ritter, who for years had been using Dr. Coffee's lab as a one-man crime laboratory.

"I guess the Swami told you I been looking for you since early yesterday."

"Hello, Max," Dr. Coffee said. "I just got back. I had to travel upstate for an insurance company autopsy."

"Maybe you're still in an autopsy mood, then," the detective said. "I got another one for you."

"Homicide, Max?"

"The Coroner thinks so. Me, I ain't so sure. You know a guy named Fred Best? He says he knows you."

Dr. Coffee nodded. "He runs a medical supply house here in town. Somebody kill Best?"

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"I been holding him as a material witness," Ritter said, "but I guess I change that to suspicion of murder. The gal died an hour ago right here in this hospital, so the Coroner says okay for you to do the P.M. He'll call you."

"Sit down, Max. Who's the girl?"

The detective lowered his razorback hams gingerly to the edge of Dr. Coffee's desk. He raised one bony knee and hugged it with both hands.

"Anne Ingersoll," he said. "She's Fred Best's private secretary for three-four years. Very private, if you know what I mean. Young and good-looking. Small, blonde, brown-eyed—kind of fragile build. Clinging-vine type, you might say. Only she and Best came unclung about a year and a half ago. All very friendly and civilized, according to Best. She decides to go back to Toledo and marry the high school sweetheart who always wanted to marry her anyhow. And Best is also contemplating matrimony with a pre-Anne tomato who has been playing coy until Fred's income gets high enough so he needs to write off a few dependents. Society stuff, but high-class.

"Just to prove they're still good friends, Fred gives Anne a wedding present—a little check in four figures so she can buy herself a mink coat to remember him by. Only she don't get married. She goes to Toledo for a while, then she turns up here again in trouble, and sends out an SOS for Fred Best, he says. Seems the high school sweetheart also gives her something to remember him by. So— Hey, don't go away, Swami. I want you in on this."

"If Doctor Sahib is not objecting to neglect of current duties—"

"Stick around, Dr. Mookerji," the pathologist said.

"So this Best blows the gal to a dinner and they get a little swacked and go back to the Riverside Motel where she's dug in," Ritter continued. He told Dr. Coffee the story given by Fred Best—almost word for word, since he had made Best repeat it a dozen times. He also described the events of the night of Wednesday to Thursday from the viewpoint of Wendell Schaeffer, the red-headed manager of the Riverside Motel.

"Which story do you believe?" Dr. Coffee asked.

"I ain't sure—since the Swami gets me kind of mixed up," the detective said. He lit a cigarette and pointed the smoking match at the Hindu resident. "When you don't come back yesterday afternoon, and the gal is still out cold, I ask the Swami if maybe he can't make some test to tell if she is kayoed by gas or by a couple of hard right jabs. He says sure, he'll make a blood test, and he does. But no gas."

"What test did you run, Dr. Mookerji?" the pathologist asked.

"Originally performed sodium

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hydroxide test for carbon monoxide." The Hindu wagged his turbaned head twice to the left. "Result, negative. Subsequently executed Katayama test with ammonium sulphide and acetic acid, but bright-red precipitate not forthcoming. Result, dark green, likewise negative."

"So you see, Doc," the detective said, "when science says the Best guy is lying, why would a jury believe his story, specially when the gal in question is an old flame who could dangle a paternity suit or a threat of blackmail over the guy's happy marriage?"

"Let's leave science out of this for a moment, Max. How long after the girl was removed from the motel did Dr. Mookerji take her blood sample?"

"Fourteen, maybe fifteen hours."

"Then let's not jump to conclusions, Max."

"You think maybe she does die from a beating, Doc?"

"I'll answer that one after the autopsy."

"Personally I begin to incline to the unlucky punch theory," Ritter said. "Because otherwise, how come Best and this gal are in the cabin the same length of time, and he walks out okay, but she dies?"

"That happens, Max, in gas cases. It's a matter of individual susceptibility—things like rate of breathing, relation of body weight to the gas concentration, and so on. If the girl had more to drink than Best, that could be a factor too. Tell me, Max, does Mrs. Best believe her husband's story?"

The detective puffed out his cheek like a blowfish and allowed the air to escape in a curious piping sound that could be interpreted either as a warning wail or a sigh of admiration.

"Mrs. Best," he said, "is what you might call a lulu. She says she believes her husband, and I think she believes him because she checked up on him personally. I'm sure she followed Best and the gal Wednesday night, even if I can't prove it in court; but she won't admit she's jealous or suspicious and her husband is sure she was home in bed all night waiting up for him. I think there's an off chance she barges into the cabin with both Best and his Old Flame out cold, and belts the Ingersoll gal with a sock full of rocks or something. I think there's even a chance that she and Best gang up on the gal to stop any threat of blackmail. Anyhow, all day she's calling me every hour on the hour to chew my ear off on how poor Fred wouldn't hurt a flea. She cries her eyes out because the morning papers already got him practically sitting in the electric chair." The detective turned on his best falsetto. "'You simply must get Fred darling out of this silly mess.' Silly, my left eyeball!"

"Okay, Max, I'll do the P.M. as soon as I get the nod from the Coroner. And before the inquest we

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ought to find out whether or not the gas heater in Cabin Ten is defective. Better bring me the whole stove or heater or whatever it is, so we can test it for imperfect combustion."

"Can do," Ritter said. "I was going out there today anyhow to see the motel manager. I want to look over Pretty Boy Schaeffer's registers."

"Good luck, Max." Dr. Coffee put a fatherly arm around Ritter's shoulders.

"Likewise, Leftenant," said Dr. Mookerji. "Am wishing you blessings of Ganesh, who is Hindu god of good luck and wisdom, and also remover of obstacles."

Dr. Coffee had barely returned to his lab from the autopsy room in the basement when his phone rang. He put down his enameled pails and Mason jars.

"Pathology," he said. "Hello, Max. Bringing me the stove? ... The airport? ... Where? Toledo? ... But you'll be back for the inquest? ... Good ... The flue? ... Really? ... and footprints ... Okay, Max. Happy landings."

The pathologist crossed the laboratory and tugged at the tail of his resident's pink turban. The Hindu looked up from his microscope. Dr. Coffee gestured toward the jars and pails.

"Dr. Mookerji," he said. "The gross examination indicates typical brain lesions—ring hemorrhages and areas of necrosis—but I want you to see that the tissue goes through the routine for a microscopic check. Before you put the brain into formalin, however, I want frozen sections from the anterior portion of both left and right globus pallidus and from the putamen—just in case I have to testify at the Coroner's inquest."

"No sooner pronounced than accomplished," said Dr. Mookerji.

The inquest into the death of Anne Ingersoll was held at Midtown Mortuary Chapel rather than at the County Morgue because Fred Best, through his attorney, had insisted on underwriting a first-class funeral. The Coroner's Jury had been sworn and seated. Dr. Thomas Vane, the florid, triple-chinned Coroner, shuffled papers and cleared his throat impatiently, glared importantly at the witnesses and spectators in the pews, and looked at his thick gold watch.

Dr. Coffee, who had been standing at the door waiting anxiously for Max Ritter, finally took a front-row seat. He had heard nothing more from Max except a telegram from Toledo saying that his mission had been accomplished and that he was flying home. When the hour for the inquest approached and Max had not appeared, Dr. Coffee had suggested postponement, but the Coroner had refused. After all, Lieutenant Ritter had been informed of time and place;

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he should have allowed for such contingencies as a plane being late...

The Coroner pounded his gavel. Fred Best, sitting between two plain-clothes men, squirmed uneasily as he glanced at the dour, bespectacled assistant district attorney who smugly returned the look with grim expectancy: he would take over where the Coroner left off. Betty Best smiled encouragingly at her husband from across the aisle. The family attorney next to her also smiled, but not encouragingly. A brooding hush hovered over the assemblage like the faint scent of flowers lingering from a just-finished funeral. The silent golden pipes of the great organ behind the jurors seemed waiting to burst into wild, tragic chords.

"Call the first witness," the Coroner said. "Mr. Wendell Schaeffer."

The dapper young manager of the Riverside Motel walked jauntily to the stand and sat down. He testified that the deceased had been living in Cabin Ten for three months, off and on; that she rented the cabin on a monthly basis although she was sometimes away on business for a week at a time; he did not know what her business was.

On Wednesday night he had seen the deceased come home with a strange man and a few minutes later had heard loud quarreling voices in Cabin Ten. One voice he recognized as that of the deceased. At two o'clock Thursday morning he had been awakened by the sound of an automobile. Thinking it was a motorist wanting a cabin, he got up and saw the car driving off. Then he noticed that the lights were still on in Cabin Ten and that the door was open. He investigated and found Miss Ingersoll lying on her bed, unconscious. She was fully dressed and her face was badly bruised and bleeding. He had promptly called the police.

"This man who came home with Miss Ingersoll," the Coroner asked, "do you see him in this chapel?"

"Yes, sir. That's him right there." The motel manager pointed.

"Let the record show the witness indicated Mr. Frederick Best," said the Coroner to the stenotypist. "In his statement to the police, Mr. Best insists that Miss Ingersoll hurt her face by falling off the bed. Did you find her on the floor, Mr. Schaeffer?"

"No, sir. She was on the bed."

"Did you smell gas when you entered Cabin Ten?"

"No, sir. The heater was burning but there was no smell of gas. Anyhow, I know the heater's in good condition and there's no leaks. A man from the gas company checked all the heaters and connections at the motel just last week."

"Thank you, Mr. Schaeffer. You may step down. Next witness, Lieutenant Max Ritter . . . Lieutenant Ritter?"

There was no response.

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"Dr. P. L. Green," called the Coroner.

Dr. Green testified that he examined Miss Ingersoll on her admittance to Pasteur Hospital, that he had treated her bruises and made unsuccessful attempts to revive her. She had remained in a coma until her death—from causes he had been unable to ascertain clinically.

"Isn't it possible, Doctor," the Coroner asked, "that the blows which had caused the bruises on the face of the deceased could also have caused her unconsciousness and ultimately her death?"

"Possible, yes. But why advance possibilities, since there has been an autopsy?"

While the Coroner was pursuing his efforts to get the witness to commit himself as to the cause of death, Dr. Motilal Mookerji made a breathless entrance into the funeral chapel and waddled rapidly down the aisle. When he reached Dr. Coffee's pew, the Hindu panted for an instant, then leaned over to announce in a stage whisper: "Leftenant Ritter just now telephoning from aerodrome to reveal he is rushing therefrom with utmost haste. Is quite insistent that inquest be protracted to permit arrival. Emphatically suggests employment of skillful tactics of delay and prolongation."

"Take a seat, Doctor," murmured Dr. Coffee. "I'll do my best."

"Next witness, Dr. Daniel Webster Coffee."

There was a pause while Dr. Coffee lowered his big-boned frame into the witness chair. The Coroner studied his papers with magisterial phlegm as the pathologist ran his long fingers through his hair.

"Dr. Coffee," said the Coroner at last, "did you conduct a post-mortem examination of the body of Anne Ingersoll, deceased, at Pasteur Hospital?"

"I did."

"Would you give the jury the benefit of your findings?"

"Gladly. First, we found that the deceased had been gestating for about four months. Second, we found congestion of the lungs and viscera. Third—"

"Just a moment, Doctor. Did your examination enable you to reach a reasonable conclusion as to the cause of death?"

"Yes, sir. Miss Ingersoll died from carbon monoxide poisoning."

The ensuing silence was eloquent. It was followed by an excited murmur which ran through the chapel like a sudden wind rising in a pine woods. The Coroner banged his gavel for quiet.

"Isn't it a fact, Doctor," he demanded, "that your own laboratory tested the blood of Miss Ingersoll before her death and found no trace of carbon monoxide?"

"That is correct, sir."

"And you still sit there, Doctor, and expect the jury to believe Miss Ingersoll came to her death by carbon monoxide poisoning?"

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"Yes, sir," said Dr. Coffee. "The chemical tests which gave negative reactions in the case of Miss Ingersoll are not sensitive to less than ten per cent. of carbon in the blood. Had Miss Ingersoll died in Cabin Ten, her blood would have given a positive reaction for carbon monoxide. However, as she lived for fourteen or fifteen hours after being removed from the poisonous atmosphere, her body had eliminated the carbon from the bloodstream. As a rule, when the victim lives for a while, the system will get rid of most of the carbon in eight or ten hours."

The Coroner, who had a much better grasp of politics than of forensic pathology, pursed his lips in a gesture of learned contemplation.

"Her body got rid of the carbon monoxide and yet she died," he said. "Can you tell the jury why she died, and how you came to the conclusion that she was poisoned?"

"Gladly. Carbon monoxide kills by combining with the red blood cells in such a way that the blood can no longer carry oxygen. Without oxygen, brain tissue dies, causing first unconsciousness, then death. The autopsy showed typical lesions in Miss Ingersoll's brain," Dr. Coffee stated.

The Coroner asked, "What lesions, Doctor?"

"Tiny ring hemorrhages and areas of dead cells in certain parts of the gray matter of the brain. When they occur in these same regions of the brain, they are characteristic of carbon monoxide poisoning."

"Couldn't the brain damage have been due to the same blows which caused the face wounds and produced the deceased's unconsciousness?"

"No, sir," said Dr. Coffee, who then proceeded to explain why the Coroner was wrong—and at great length in order, he hoped, to give Max Ritter time to get from the airport. Even when there is no skull fracture, the pathologist said, a blow violent enough to produce coma usually tears the membranes surrounding the brain or injures the brain surfaces, causing bleeding. In the case of Miss Ingersoll he had found no massive hemorrhages, no lacerations, no blood in the spinal fluid. The brain damage was caused, he repeated, by the lack of life-sustaining oxygen—by carbon monoxide poisoning.

"I wish you would explain to the jury, Doctor," said the Coroner smugly, "just how and where Miss Ingersoll managed to inhale this monoxide you talk about, inasmuch as the gas company checked and okayed the Riverside Motel heaters just last week."

"A very good question," Dr. Coffee replied. "In fact, I have suggested to Police Lieutenant Ritter that he try to find the answer. Here's the lieutenant now. You might ask him what he's found."

Max Ritter's advance down the

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aisle was almost a lope. He made rubbery glances at the Coroner as he eased his angular body into the pew beside Dr. Mookerji. Then his facial muscles relaxed into an expression which, since it was a shade less mournful than usual, suggested to Dr. Coffee that the detective was quietly digesting a large canary.

A moment later the lieutenant had replaced the pathologist in the witness chair, and was answering the Coroner's question.

"Sure, there's a flue," he said, "only the flue's clogged up. Somebody climbs the roof of Cabin Ten and stuffs an old pair of work jeans down the pipe. I find ladder marks in the snow on the eaves, and footprints in the snow on the roof. And since there's no fresh snow *in* the prints, they must've been made after ten fifteen Wednesday night, when it stops snowing, and before two thirty Thursday morning when the cops get there. We keep a watch on the cabin ever since.

"Moulage? Sure, we made molds, but they ain't accurate on account of the sun melted the edges of the prints some. Anyhow, we don't need any. Those jeans got a Toledo store label in 'em, also a laundry mark. So I fly to Toledo and get the local cops to help me trace the laundry mark to a young guy who a year ago runs a gas station and moves in with a pretty little brown-eyed blonde he calls his wife but who the landlady says signs the rent checks with the name of Anne Ingersoll. The landlady tells me that about four months ago this Anne Ingersoll draws all her money out of the bank and gives it to this guy who used to be her high school sweetheart. Seems he tells her that if she'll buy him the gas station, they can really get married. Only when he gets the dough, he takes a powder instead of the marriage vows, and it takes her a month to catch up with him.

"Seems she finds he comes to Northbank and plunks down Anne's money as first payment on the Riverside Motel. I check with the county clerk's office here and I find the deed to the Riverside Motel is in the name of a guy named—"

There was a commotion at the back of the chapel. Heads craned. Shouts of "Where's he going?" and "Stop him!" echoed from the stained-glass windows. The Coroner pounded his gavel until his chins quivered and grew three shades redder. Dr. Mookerji remarked to Dr. Coffee, "Gentleman with scarlet hairs is quite nimble sprinter." Several jurors stood up, visibly shocked by the realization that they were not only confronted by murder, but by a diabolically ingenious murder which not only disposed of a dangerous threat but placed the blame logically on another man.

"As I was sayin'," Max Ritter continued when he could make himself heard, "the name is Wendell Schaeffer who, by the way,

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ain't runnin' very far. I got people waitin' outside for him. Any more questions, Coroner?"

There were no more questions. The jury was ready to retire. The assistant district attorney arose to suggest that the Coroner direct the jurors to bring in an open verdict, inasmuch as the State was ready to go to trial as soon as an indictment could be drawn and the medical and police evidence correlated.

Fred Best bolted across the aisle and threw his arms around his wife. Betty kissed him soundly. Arm in arm, they approached Dr. Coffee who was shaking Max Ritter's hand.

"You don't know how grateful I am to you, Doctor, and to the lieutenant," said Betty Best effusively. "If this had turned out any other way, I'd have felt all my life that I'd betrayed you, Fred honey."

"Betrayed me?" Best frowned. "I don't get it, darling."

Betty Best opened her handbag and presented her husband with a gold, initialed tie clasp.

"I found it on the bedroom rug right after you left to go back to the motel. You might think I'd deliberately sent you back into a trap."

Max Ritter fixed Mrs. Best with a curious, insistent stare. "It all goes to show," he said wryly, "what faith will do. If you hadn't had such confidence in your husband, I might not have dug so deep into this case."

"Most warming to cockleshells of heart," exclaimed Dr. Motilal Mookerji, "to discover human confidence and scientific microscope on same side of judicial fence."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**HELEN McCLOY**
TITLE:	***The Outer Darkness***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Judge John Cadmus
LOCALE:	Bradbury, United States
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*In every murder, says the author, there are two victims: the killed and the killer. It is the second victim, the killer, who suffers most . . . A tautly constructed and deeply absorbing novelette, complete in this issue.*

HE WAS SURE SHE HAD NOT NOTICED him. She was sitting halfway down the parlor car and she had no eyes for anyone but the man beside her. If her glance should stray down the aisle, she was not likely to recognize a grizzled head and thin, stooped shoulders. But he could see her plainly over the top of his newspaper.

She was handsome. Reluctantly he admitted that any young man might be taken in by her. The thick, black hair grew low in a point at the center of the wide, white forehead, a frame for brilliant eyes of smoky hazel. Only the mouth was coarse, but it had character. Or was it merely obstinacy? He found it hard to be just to her.

She had learned to dress since she married Paul. The green linen suit had quality. When she moved one hand, elongated links of gold twinkled and slid along her wrist. He couldn't find a thing to condemn, unless it was the vivid, orange lipstick. And he knew he was old-fashioned about that.

The man sat facing her. His sandy, bristly hair was so scant that the roseate scalp showed through.

© 1950-51 by Helen McCloy; originally titled "Shake Hands With Death"

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His neck was a bulge of pink flesh above a tan, tweed collar. He was too young to be so fleshy. Almost gross . . . They were laughing together, their cozy intimacy an invisible wall shutting out other passengers. What should one do? Avoid her glance until they all met on the platform at Bradbury?

His gaze turned away from them to the window beside him. It was raining; too dark to see anything but an occasional road light. Now arc lamps raced along a roofed platform and shadowy faces looked soiled and colorless in their glare. The long train of cars was grinding to a stop. Middlebury.

When the train started again, the young man was gone. So they were not going to meet in Bradbury, after all. He had known there was something wrong when he got Paul's letter, but he hadn't expected anything like this . . . Smoke was trailing from a cigarette in her hand now. A smile played around the corners of her mouth. Amusement? Satisfaction? The smile had faded by the time she put out her cigarette. She was the first to rise when the train stopped. It happened that she moved away from him toward the farther door. He breathed a sigh of relief. She had not seen him.

On the platform the country air tasted like chilled wine after the stuffy train. He hunted through the usual summer crowd, looking for a taxi. That would make things easier for everyone. He was old and tolerant. He liked things to be easy.

"Uncle John!"

He felt the grip on his forearm as he heard the voice. "Why, Paul! How are you, boy?"

Paul's lips were smiling, but his eyes were still, withdrawn. This last year had hollowed his temples and sunk his eyes more deeply under the craggy brows. Above one brow a line of scar tissue curved in the shape of a small horseshoe, the print of a shell fragment. "Boy" was hardly the word for Paul right now. He was a man, and looked it.

"I hope you didn't meet the early train," said John Cadmus.

"No, I got your telegram. But I nearly missed you, because I was looking along the day coaches. I know your frugal habits!"

"This time I indulged in a parlor-car seat. Where's Bob?"

"Summer camp."

"Already? In June?"

"I thought it would do him good to get an early start, and—Marcia agreed."

John noticed the pause before "Marcia." What had she to do with it? So far as John knew, she had always been an adequate stepmother. At least, she had never shown enough interest in Bob to make him unhappy.

"We must find Marcia now," Paul was saying. "She was on that train, too."

"Did I hear my own name?"

John's heart stumbled. How long had she been standing there?

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"Hi!" Paul greeted his wife as he had greeted his uncle, lips smiling, gaze withdrawn. "Uncle John was on your train. He telegraphed after you had gone—to let me know he couldn't make the early one."

"What a pity I didn't know!" Marcia's full lips pouted. "I was all alone the whole way from New York with nobody to talk to, not even a stranger. And to think we could have had such a nice chat, dear Uncle John!" The pout dissolved in an indulgent smile, oddly like the smile of an adult for a child.

"Yes, couldn't we?" John's voice was dry.

Marcia slid her arm through his as they began to walk toward Paul's car. He caught a faint artificial fragrance that sickened him. Why, he didn't know. Generally he liked a delicate hint of perfume about a pretty woman.

"And will you believe it?" Paul spoke with a false heartiness unlike his usual manner. "Uncle John blew himself to a parlor car this time!"

"A parlor car?" Marcia repeated the words blankly.

"Why not?" said Paul easily. "He really can afford one now and then, only, as you know, he never will. His generation has a queer idea that thrift is a virtue."

John stole a quick glance at Marcia. She was looking at him with narrowed eyes, her mouth hard, unsmiling. The moment their eyes met she looked away again.

"Wait until you see our new house," Paul was saying. "On a hillside beyond the town. Only two other houses on the same hill. One belongs to my chief at the Duross Electric Laboratory—Dr. Kopeck."

The car was climbing now. Young spruce trees cast pointed shadows on new-laid turf. They came to a house on the crest of a hill, lonely and bright as a lighted ship on a dark ocean.

"Let me help you, Uncle John?" Marcia took his arm again. The front door opened directly into a large living-room with a modern picture window.

"Charming," said John, thinking nostalgically of old-fashioned houses with privacy insured by vestibule and hall.

"You're to have Bob's room," said Paul. "I'll show you the way." Upstairs he indicated various doors. "This is Marcia's room. This is mine. There is a bath between. And another bath for Bob's room."

"You and Marcia no longer share a room?" ventured John.

"No. The modern way is more comfortable for everybody."

Bob's room was papered gaily to a boy's taste—tiny Navajo Indians and clumps of cactus on terra-cotta red. John sat in an armchair by the window. "I'm sorry Bob isn't here now."

"So am I." Paul proffered cigarettes.

"No thanks, I've given up smok-

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ing." John sighed. "Well, Paul, I read your letter carefully, but it didn't explain much. Why is it you want to divorce Marcia?"

Paul was sitting astride a wall chair. His voice was tired, uninflected. "Because she cannot tell the truth."

"What children call white lies? Fibs?"

"No. Everything she says is false. She does not know what truth is."

"But what reason has she?"

"You don't understand." Paul rested his chin on his hand. "She doesn't have to have a reason. Marcia lies the way a kleptomaniac steals—not because she needs to but because she *likes* to.

"The intelligent adult keeps his lying down to the bare minimum that is socially necessary. And he takes care not to lie at all when he knows he will be found out. Marcia lies whenever she possibly can, even when she knows the truth will catch up with her in the next thirty minutes. What's more, she goes on lying after the truth has caught up with her, when there is no further possibility of deceiving anybody but herself. That's what makes it neurotic.

"And because she so nearly believes in her own lies, she utters them with a ring of sincerity that no ordinary liar could achieve. So, when truth doesn't catch up with her, she can make people accept monstrous falsehoods about me or Bob or anyone else. Have you any idea what it's like to live with a person and never be sure what she's saying about you? Or whether anything she says to you is true or false? There is such a thing as psychopathic lying, isn't there?"

"Yes. It's a mental disease in the same class as arson and kleptomania, as you said, yourself."

"You were on the bench eight years, Uncle John. Did you ever have anyone like that in your court?"

To John the idea that any member of his family might have anything in common with the unhappy wretches who landed in a criminal court was new and unnerving.

"Yes," he said sadly. "I had a few cases. Hugh Dennison shot and killed his wife, claiming that she was unfaithful. She was innocent, but he believed the story of another woman. A textbook case of a pathological liar . . . Have you thought of psychiatric treatment for Marcia?"

"She won't hear of it. She says psychiatrists drive borderline cases over the edge." Paul lit a cigarette. "Now I can tell you why Bob isn't at home. I caught him twice in lies just like Marcia's—stupid, unnecessary lies, cowardly fantasies. Next fall he'll have to go to boarding school. He can never live at home again. And he's my only son. I want him here with me. That's why divorce is the only way out. This thing has become intolerable. But Marcia refuses to divorce me, and she says it's because she—loves me."

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John was shocked at the venom in Paul's voice. "Does she?"

"How do I know? If so, it's the first time she's told the truth in years! The way things are, the very fact that she says she loves me makes me doubt it. I never know whether I'm on solid ground or quicksand. If I really loved her I suppose I could stand it. I cannot stand it, so I suppose I don't really love her."

"You must have loved her when you married her," said John gently.

"Did I?" Paul paced the room restlessly. "What is love? Different things at different times. I don't love her now."

John frowned. "A wife can make it difficult for a husband if he wants a divorce and she doesn't. Have you offered money?"

"Half my earnings and the life insurance that is now in Bob's name. I'd give anything to be rid of her."

John winced. Why did this have to happen to Paul? John had no children. Paul could not remember his own parents. The tie between them was as close as that of father and son. Perhaps closer.

"I can't sue her for divorce," Paul was saying. "I have no legal grounds for complaint. I can't simply walk out. She would bring suit against me for desertion, making as big a scandal as possible. Think what that would do to Bob.

"Is her refusal just blackmail? A bid for more money?"

"I don't know."

"Is there anything I can do?"

Paul managed a rueful smile. "You knew I wanted something, didn't you? It isn't much. I just want you to talk to her. She's always liked you. She'd listen to you if she'd listen to anybody."

She's always liked you. John felt the sharp stab of irony. And guilt. For he had not liked her and she had never suspected it.

"Wouldn't that seem intrusive of me?" demurred John.

"Not to Marcia. She'll talk over her most intimate affairs with anybody. She's probably told her side of the story to everyone in Bradbury by this time."

"Then she has a side?" ventured John.

"I suppose so. I've reached the point where I can't be fair to Marcia. If you want to hear her side, you'll have to hear it from her." Paul rose abruptly. "I'd better clear out now and give you a chance to rest before dinner."

The door closed. John was alone in the gaily papered room.

His hands trembled as he began to unpack his few well-worn belongings. Only a man who had spent years in court could realize all the ugly possibilities of the situation as John did. There was that Ambleton paternity case and the Hogan libel suit. Jane Hogan's own husband had testified against her, using the same words that Paul had used: *She does not know what truth*

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is . . . John paused in his unpacking. Curious. In each of those cases, pathological lying had led to death by violence.

Suddenly he realized why the heady perfume that clung to Marcia's garments had sickened him at the station. It was like the overloaded sweetness of massed lilies at a funeral . . .

A single lamp with a parchment shade bathed the living-room in mellow light. On the hearth a wood fire crackled, taking the dampness out of the air. Above the mantel a large, unframed mirror reflected the view from the open, picture window—a sloping shoulder of hill, black against a starry sky. The rain had stopped, but the outdoor air was still cool. John considered the window seat below the wide window; then chose the wing chair close to the fire.

There was a step on the stairs, and Marcia came down into the room. A brittle sound came with her—the creak of silk taffeta. It was a pale citron that set off her white skin magnificently.

John remembered his first vision of Marcia, a snapshot Paul had sent home from Africa of a girl in trim WAC's uniform, standing in the blazing sunshine against a whitewashed wall. The letter with the snapshot spoke of her as "Mrs. Damien." John had supposed her a widow then and thought her attractive.

She made a less pleasant impression when he met her in New York. It was a hot day and she was out of uniform by that time, hatless and gloveless. The snapshot had not prepared him for the lavish use of lipstick or the high, harsh voice in which she told him that she was getting a divorce so she could marry Paul. She had changed since those days. Now there was a hoydenish grace peculiarly her own in the way she crossed the room and curled up on the window seat.

"Has Paul told you about us? I thought that was why he took you to your room as soon as you got here. You'll have to make him see reason. It takes two to make a divorce—without scandal."

"You're not opposed to divorce on principle?" John's tone was matter-of-fact. "You were divorced, yourself, before you married Paul."

"That was different. My first marriage was an adolescent mistake. My first husband was as tired of me as I was of him. But I love Paul. I won't give him up."

"Not even for his own sake?"

"Oh, I don't pretend to love him unselfishly. I love the life we have together. You couldn't possibly have any idea what my life was before I married Paul. I was born in a wretched little seashore place in Oregon. Not a summer resort. A fishing village and factory town. Canneries all along the waterfront and smokehouses for herring. Dark, damp sheds of rotting wood, built

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on piles above the harbor water, which became twenty-five feet of evil-smelling mud flats every day at low tide.

"Even outside it was ugly — a cluster of drab little houses built on a hill shaped like a pyramid with a hideous little church at the top. No one bothered to plant flowers. But everywhere were those horrible trees, tall trunks with bare branches and narrow leaves and poisonous-looking red berries in the fall. Maybe the others liked living in Jenkinsville. I didn't. But I was caught there."

John looked about the room and realized how greatly her life had changed. "You did get out," he said quietly.

"Yes. I did get out. But it cost me something." Her voice was bitter. "In a town like that you marry when you leave high school. I thought I was in love. Captain of the basketball team. A local hero, with a job in his father's hardware store. For three years I lived the life of a Jenkinsville wife, drudgery and boredom relieved only by quarrels over money. When the war came he was caught in the draft. That was my chance.

"Is it any wonder I did well in the WAC? I used my severance pay to get a Reno divorce. Luckily, Rick had been going places, too. He was as glad to get rid of me as I was to get rid of him. I have no idea where he is now. But I've made Paul a good wife, and now, out of a blue sky, he asks me for a divorce! How could I live without Paul? He hasn't money enough to pay big alimony and I've never had a job outside the Army. I wouldn't know how to go about getting one that paid well. I have no friends in the East and—"

John looked at Marcia more critically. "No friends at all. What about the young man on the train tonight?"

Her eyes opened wide. "Young man on the train?" Her astonishment was childlike. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"I saw you, Marcia. I was in the same parlor car, but I suppose you didn't see me. When you tell me you have no friends here, I can't help wondering about the man on the train."

"Uncle John, you must have mistaken someone else for me!"

Until this moment Marcia's story had roused John's pity. But now Paul's words came back to John with renewed force: *Everything she says is false* . . . How much of her story was true? Was any of it true? Even now, some of the things she had said still had the ring of truth to John. But this last lie wasn't even plausible. She must realize now that he had seen her on the train.

"You don't believe me!" Marcia's voice was harsh. "Have you told Paul about this so-called man on the train?"

"No, and I'm not going to tell him. I should be afraid, Marcia.

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Afraid of what Paul might do."

"What could he do?" Her gaze shifted toward the open window and the dark hill under the stars. "Paul will never be able to push me back into the outer darkness I came from, not now that I've had my taste of sitting beside the warm, bright fire!"

The symbol was so poetic, so unexpected from Marcia, that John was startled and touched. "My dear, the outer darkness is always around us, pressing against us, waiting for us. We all came out of it, and some day we shall all go back to it."

"You mean dying?" Her voice was flat. "That's different! But while I'm alive I'm going to have all the warmth and brightness there is!" She flung her arms wide in a theatrical gesture. On either side, the window frame was far beyond her fingertips. Her head lifted and her shoulders fell back against the screen.

"Look out!" John was on his feet. "You shouldn't lean against a screen like that. Suppose the catch gave way?"

She smiled at an old man's caution. "It's perfectly safe. This is my favorite seat in summer. Almost every evening you'll find me here leaning against the screen."

"There is only one little catch at the bottom to hold it."

"It's metal, strong enough to support ten people. See?"

He tried the catch with his hand. It was as firm as the sill. "But suppose some window cleaner were careless and left the catch insecurely fastened?" he insisted. "There's nothing you could hold on to. You can't reach the window frame with your hands, and your feet don't touch the floor. Under your weight, the screen would swing out on its upper hinges and you'd fall through. Of course, it isn't far, but—"

"It's twenty feet." Marcia was suddenly uneasy. "The house is built against the hill. This room is at ground level on the other side, where the French windows are, but here the garage is under it."

"And a paved driveway," added John soberly.

"Don't look so worried!" Marcia laughed. "You see this knob? You have to turn it right around to release the catch. It's too stiff for me. I always have to ask Paul to open it for me. He's the only person around here who can budge it."

"I see." He tried the knob. It was too stiff for his old fingers. "But I don't like window screens." His murmur was half apologetic. "When I was a boy I had a puppy that bounced against one in play. We had thought it securely fastened. But it wasn't. He was killed."

"How awful!" Her sympathy was synthetic. "Whose side are you on, Uncle John? Paul's or mine?"

"Do we have to take sides? You're both unhappy. For you, there is only one way to keep Paul's

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respect and friendship: by setting him free."

"I don't want Paul's respect and friendship. I want his love."

"You cannot force a man to love you. Have you asked Paul why he wants a divorce?"

"I don't have to ask him. I know. The usual reason. You'll meet her tonight at dinner."

"I don't understand," John was utterly taken aback.

"She gives me a hold over Paul." Marcia went on with certain satisfaction, "He wouldn't really mind scandal for himself. Or even for Bob. But he would mind it for her, Christine."

Christine Laverly sat before her dressing table listlessly putting the last touches to her hair and nails. She had reached a point where nothing in her life was unpredictable. In another moment she would go into her mother's room, and she knew exactly what her mother would say: "Wearing the lavender tonight, are you, Christine? You'll want my amethyst beads . . . No flowers?"

Christine would smile and say, "Dr. Kopeck is calling for me tonight. Can you imagine him with a gardenia?"

"Oh—" Her mother would lose interest. "One of those new people you met through Duross Electric. I don't know him, do I?"

"No," Christine would answer. "You don't know him." There were so many people and things that her mother did not know. An invalid who had not left her room for fourteen years could not be expected to know how much the world had changed, even in Bradbury. Christine sighed and went into the hall.

Norah had just reached the head of the stairs, carrying Mrs. Lavery's supper tray. "There's a package for you, Miss Christine. Just a minute. I'll get it." She set the tray on the hall table and ran downstairs. She came back with a long, white cardboard box.

Christine lifted the lid. There was a wave of cool fragrance from green tissue paper. She pushed the folds aside. Deep red roses, six of them, bound with rose-red ribbon to form an old-fashioned nosegay.

"There must be a card," said Norah.

But there wasn't.

"Maybe he's shy," Norah smiled.

"Who, Norah?"

"Dr. Kopeck, of course. Who else could it be?"

Christine smiled faintly. "Surely not Dr. Kopeck!"

"Well, he must have. And they're just the thing for your lavender dress."

Christine tucked the roses inside her belt and turned to look at the hall mirror. Her whole appearance had changed. The wan girl in lavender had become a brilliantly blonde woman with this bold splash of crimson at her waist. She went

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proudly into her mother's room.

"Roses? Then for once Dr. Kopeck did remember. But I don't care for red with lavender. It's not good taste, dear. White, or very pale yellow, would be better. This is too foreign. He is a foreigner, isn't he?"

"He was born in Europe," answered Christine shortly. "He's been an American for twenty years . . . I'm late. I really must go. Good night, Mother dear." Christine left the room.

Norah was in the hall. "Dr. Kopeck is here. I told him you would be down in a moment."

Karel Kopeck stood in the lower hall looking up as she came down. Lamplight caught the wide sweep of his brow. Even when his lips were smiling, as they were now, his deep-set eyes looked upon the world with an expression of mildly astonished sadness. To Mrs. Lavery and other old inhabitants of Bradbury he was still "one of those new people." To the world at large he was "Dr. Kopeck, the great physicist." But to Christine and a few others who worked with him, he was "Chief" or "Karel."

"It was thoughtful of you to send roses," said Christine.

"Thoughtful of me?" He hesitated. "Christine, I wish I had thought of it. Next time I shall."

They were going down the front steps. She turned to look at him. "You didn't? Then who did? There was no card."

"No?" This seemed to disturb him. "I don't like the idea of your wearing flowers when you don't know who sent them," he said as they got into his car.

"I think I can guess, now I know it wasn't you. Who else knew I was going out to dinner tonight? Only the other people who were going to be there: Paul Cadmus; his wife, Marcia; his uncle, John; and your sister, Minna. I never met Paul's uncle, so that leaves Paul."

"Then why no card?"

"I suppose the florist forgot it."

They were driving through dark streets. Light from lampposts flashed and faded as they passed. "I must talk seriously," said Kopeck, his eyes on the road. "I like you. So does Minna. I wouldn't like to see anything bad happen to you, or to Paul. How well do you know him?"

"I met him when he first came to Duross Electric, a year before Pearl Harbor. He was a widower then with a little boy. We saw quite a lot of each other. Perhaps I did have a vague hope. Oh, what's the use?" She smiled crookedly. "Every unmarried woman is an adventuress at heart. Every man she meets is a possibility."

Kopeck's voice sharpened. "You loved Paul, didn't you?"

"I have never told anyone." Her voice was almost inaudible. "You know what happened. The war came. He went overseas, and when he came back he brought Marcia."

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"Nothing is final today, not even marriage. You see why I don't want you to wear the roses? Because of Marcia."

Christine's cheeks warmed. "Suppose I say that I don't care. My life's been monotonous for years. I would enjoy a little excitement for a change."

The car turned into the road that led to the Cadmus house. "Yesterday I went into a florist's shop to order some bulbs for Minna," said Kopeck. "I overheard someone I knew ordering six red roses to be sent to someone else. The florist asked about a card. The answer was an emphatic: 'No.'"

"You mean the person who ordered the roses was Paul?"

"No. It wasn't Paul."

"Oh." Elation ebbed in one long sigh. "Who was it, then?"

His reply came crisply. "Marcia."

"Marcia?" Christine gasped. "Why on earth should Marcia send me flowers without a card?"

"She knew you would find out I had not sent the roses as soon as you thanked me for them. She wanted to see if you would still wear the roses when you believed they came from Paul."

"Wouldn't it have been better strategy to put one of Paul's cards in the box?"

"A card without a message would have seemed a little too distant between you and Paul, who see each other every day at the laboratory. Marcia couldn't write a message on the card because she couldn't imitate Paul's writing. But the absence of any card at all implies that you and Paul are on terms where anonymous flowers can come from him."

"And I was going to thank Paul! How Marcia would have enjoyed that!" Christine bent her head and leaned one cheek against the roses. "Why did she do it, Karel? Does she really believe that Paul and I are lovers? Or is she trying to trap Paul in a compromising situation?"

"I don't know, Marcia has a remarkable capacity for self-deception. If she wants to believe you and Paul are lovers, she will believe it. And she'll try to make other people believe it, too."

Christine was startled. "That would be ghastly for Paul!"

"And for you." Kopeck brought the car to a stop before the Cadmus house. "Please don't give her the slightest basis for this fantasy. There's no knowing what Paul might do if he found out what Marcia is trying to do to you."

"I wonder if he'd care." Christine was bitter. "Karel, why did she pick *me?* Paul knows lots of women. Why didn't Marcia choose someone with a rakish reputation? Like that Mrs. Hamlin, who has been divorced three times?"

"Rachel Hamlin is far too experienced to take chances and fall into traps. Today she values her friends in Bradbury and her hard-won respectability above everything else.

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It had to be someone like you, Christine. Someone artless who often says, 'My life has been monotonous. I might enjoy a little excitement for a change.'"

"How well you know me!" Christine's fingers fumbled at the roses in her belt. "And how well Marcia knows me! I myself, didn't realize I had such possibilities until tonight." She dropped the roses on the floor of the car.

Kopeck kicked them out of sight, under the seat. "Good girl," he said briefly. "Now, you must look as if nothing had happened."

"I'm good at that. I've been doing it all my life. And" — Christine laughed — "nothing has happened, has it?"

After dinner, Marcia poured coffee at a small table in front of the fire, her head sleek and black against the peacock blue of the wing, her long dress a drift of pale citron falling to her ankles. John sat near Kopeck, but a little apart from the others, where he could watch them as a group.

Kopeck said, "I know you by reputation, Mr. Cadmus, as an astute lawyer and an impartial judge."

John laughed. "It's hardly necessary to say that I know you by reputation. All the world knows Karel Kopeck."

"But there was a time when you were not so well-known, wasn't there?" Marcia smiled at Kopeck. "About twenty-five years ago. At least, that's what I told Colonel Ripon in New York."

The hush was startling. For a moment there wasn't even a tinkle of china.

Deliberately Paul set his cup and saucer down on the mantelpiece. "You saw Colonel Ripon? In New York?"

"Why, yes. Didn't I mention that before?" Marcia's glance slid to Paul for an instant, then darted away again.

John tried to effect a distraction. "Who is Colonel Ripon?"

Kopeck explained, "The Duross Electric research laboratory is under contract to the Federal Government. We are under the supervision of Military Intelligence, because everything we do has potential military value. Colonel Ripon is the officer assigned to us. He visits us here about once a month."

Paul ignored the diversion. "Marcia, what did you tell Colonel Ripon?"

"I just told him that Karel was a rather mysterious figure."

"Mysterious?" Minna's foreign intonation was more marked than her brother's. Even in plain black she looked solid and heavy, built for hard, physical labor, like a woman of peasant stock. "There is nothing mysterious about Karel!" she protested.

"No?" Marcia's eyes narrowed. "Then why didn't he go overseas during the war? It was you who

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told me about that, Christine. You said it was decided Dr. Kopeck was to go overseas and you with him. You both got as far as inoculations and investigation by the F.B.I. Then, quite suddenly, it was all cancelled. That's what I call mysterious."

"But you've twisted it!" Christine's voice was trembling. "I told you only how disappointed I was. I didn't say there was anything mysterious about it."

"I could have told you the reason!" snapped Minna. "Karel was anemic. Army doctors decided that no one with such severe anemia could stand the rationed food and loss of sleep in England during the air raids."

Paul groaned aloud. "Did you have to discuss this with Ripon, Marcia?"

"Why shouldn't I?" Marcia was defiant.

Christine looked at Marcia with sudden fear. "What else did you tell him? About the rest of us?"

"We chatted about all sorts of things."

There was a brittle crash. Paul's coffee cup lay on the hearthstone, shivered into a dozen splinters. An accident? Or an uncontrollable outburst of anger?

Stolidly he kicked the fragments into the fire. "I don't suppose we'll ever know what Marcia said about us to Ripon," he said grimly. "Unless we hear from Ripon himself—as we probably shall."

"Don't take it too seriously, Paul," said Kopeck. "I'm sure Ripon will make allowances for Marcia's imagination."

An inspiration came to John. "Is this Colonel Ripon a rather heavy, bull-necked man with light, bristly hair?"

"No," Kopeck answered. "He's tall, slight, and dark."

"I don't know what you're worried about." Marcia bridled. "Christine, you're white as paper. You need something to brighten that dull dress. Why don't you wear roses? Red roses?"

Color almost as brilliant as roses stained Christine's cheeks. John studied her with detachment. The nose and chin were pointed almost too delicately. There was none of the flamboyance or earthiness he had expected in the woman who had roused Marcia's jealousy. But there were other possibilities—fragility, weakness.

"Marcia, I—" Paul stopped. They all heard steps on the porch. Then came a long, strident peal of the doorbell.

"It's probably our neighbor, Mrs. Hamlin," said Kopeck.

"Rachel never bothers to ring the bell unless she has some stranger with her." Marcia was frowning.

It was Paul who jerked open the door. "Rachel!"

"Are we too late?"

John had heard of Rachel Hamlin as a playwright who had discarded three husbands. He saw her now as

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a small, neat, silver-haired woman in black velvet slacks and jacket. At her heels came a tall, broad-shouldered man in tweeds with light hair and a mustache.

Marcia moved forward smiling. "Better late than never! And this is Mr. . . .?" Her voice trailed away uncertainly.

"My dear friend, Harvey Graham."

The short mustache bristled as the thick upper lip curled back from large white teeth. "How delightful!"

Marcia's smile was fixed and brilliant. She inclined her head briefly, without extending her hand. "Do sit down, Rachel. And you, Mr. Graham."

But Graham had paused by the piano. "Splendid-looking instrument. Do you mind?" He sat down. The first few chords had a professional fluency.

"Harvey is a TV producer in New York now," said Rachel. "But he used to play the piano on a radio program on the West Coast."

"You are a Californian, Mr. Graham?" inquired Minna Kopeck.

"No, I come from Lindale in northern Maine." Harvey struck a chord.

"I know that part of Maine," said John. "I used to go sailing out of Bar Harbor when I was a young man."

Abruptly the casual chords gave way to a wave of syrupy sentimentality. Harvey was singing in a light, untrained tenor. A plaintive ballad of remembering an unrequited love.

Harvey's foot came down on the loud pedal. He threw his head back, looking at Marcia. "That was our signature on the West Coast." He leaned his right hand on the last chord and let his left hand frolic in a series of arpeggios.

Now that the face was turned away from John he noticed that the tweed jacket was tan. Above its collar the neck bulged in a thick roll of rosy flesh, and through the close-cropped bristles of sandy hair the scalp showed pink. John laid a hand on the back of a chair to steady himself. Now he was sure Harvey Graham was the man who had been on the train with Marcia.

Had she expected to see him again tonight? John recalled how her smile had become fixed and her voice had trailed away: "And this is Mr. . . .?"

The pantomime was clever enough to make an onlooker believe she was meeting Harvey Graham for the first time. But what was underneath? The genuine astonishment of a woman caught off guard? Or the collusive twinkle of a fellow conspirator?

John slept late. He woke to shafts of golden light piercing the half-drawn shades. He went to an open window. Grass beaded with dew sparkled in the sun. The world seemed newly made.

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Walking down the hall toward the stairs, a voice reached him so charged with anger that for a moment he did not recognize it as Paul's.

"We can't go on like this! How can you be happy with me, when I don't love you? And how can I love you, when your unbridled tongue is making my life intolerable? My job is threatened. My only son can't live with me. The man I admire and respect most in this world—Kopeck—is slandered to the one man who can harm him and his work — Ripon. Now, you're even libeling Christine! Heaven only knows where it will stop? What will I have left without my child, my friends, and my work? Let's call it a day and get a decent divorce."

"No." Marcia's voice was clear and carrying as the voice of an actress. "I will not let you get a divorce without a resounding scandal involving your dear friend, Christine. So, what are you going to do about it?"

John was shaken and miserable. Walking as loudly as possible, he hurried down the stairs. The breakfast table was set beside the picture window. Paul was standing, his chair overturned as if he had sprung to his feet a moment ago. Marcia sat serenely on the window seat on the other side of the table.

"Up already?" She smiled at John. "I'll ring for fresh coffee."

No place had been set at table for John and no extra chair. Marcia patted the window seat beside her. "Won't you sit here?"

He was tired. He sat down thankfully.

Paul roused himself. "Would you like the morning paper?"

"Thank you." John leaned back against the screen to get a better light. He heard the scraping sound at the same moment that he felt the giddy sensation. He was tilting backward, overbalanced, against something that failed to retain his weight against the unresisting air.

Paul leaped and caught John's shoulder in a grip like iron. John's heart tripped and his gorge rose. He turned his head toward the window. The screen was flying through space, swinging outward on its hinges. As he looked, it crashed back against the sill. The whole thing had happened in a few seconds.

"My heavens!" Paul spoke softly, as if he were praying. He pulled John away from the window. "I thought that catch was safe."

"So did I." Marcia's voice was high, teetering on the sheer edge of hysteria. "It's never slipped before. Only last night I was showing it to Uncle John and telling him how safe it was."

"If I hadn't happened to be standing near him . . ." Paul shuddered. "I happen to be rather fond of you, Uncle John."

John rose. "I want to look at that catch."

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"It must have broken under your weight." Paul frowned.

John looked down to the concrete drive where his broken body might have been lying now. "That's strange." His voice was blank. "The catch is intact."

"It must have slipped somehow." Paul leaned over to get a better look. "Though that never happened before."

"Either that, or someone left it unfastened," said John.

"No one would be that careless!" Now Paul looked up, his eyes dull with uncertainty. "It must have slipped," he insisted. "I'm going to see the carpenter on my way to the laboratory this morning and tell him what I think of him. It was supposed to be an extra strong catch because the window is so wide . . . Better take it easy today, Uncle John. There is such a thing as delayed shock, and you're not exactly young."

"Don't worry. I'll be all right." John smiled, but his eyes were anxious.

When Paul had left the room he spoke quietly. "Marcia, you are the one who usually sits on the window seat. The one who usually leans against the screen."

"I know that!" Her words were vibrant as a sob. "It might have been I and . . . Paul might *not* have been standing by!"

In the sudden silence John's thoughts were extraordinarily clear. And they frightened him.

There was a word in his mind. A word that he must not speak to anyone, not even to Paul. A word that he must not let himself think even in the privacy of his own mind. To give it utterance would be to give it power. Once spoken, it would no longer be a word but a fact, too real for safety.

How had it come into his mind in the first place? The Ambleton paternity case and the Hogan libel suit, each a case of psychopathic lying that led to death by violence . . . Paul's brow with its livid line of scar tissue. Sometimes head wounds left invisible scar tissue in the mind after flesh and bone had healed. The prudent became reckless; the mild, violent. At least, violent enough to smash a cherished Sèvres coffee cup. "Battle fatigue" was the polite name for it.

Then there was the despair in Paul's voice as he cried: *What will I have left without my child, my friends, my work?* . . . And there was Marcia's voice saying: *The catch is too stiff for me. I always have to ask Paul to open it for me. He is the only person around here who can budge it.* The only person . . . Then there was Paul's response to the suggestion that someone had left the catch unfastened: *No one would be that careless!* . . . Possibly not, but suppose someone had been that careful? Someone with young fingers strong enough to move the knob?

"Marcia . . ."

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"Yes?" She looked up at him.

"So young, so pretty," he thought. "And so perversely in love with the good things of life that she would ruin Paul to get them." What could he say to her now? It was dangerous to say anything to a woman who could not face reality, who would distort even an innocent fact into a monstrous fantasy. But he had to say something.

"Marcia, that catch was not broken. And it could not have slipped. You showed me last night that it was unusually tight. Someone must have left it unfastened."

"How stupid." She didn't understand.

He tried again. "Do you realize you're putting tremendous pressure on Paul when you refuse him this divorce?"

Her eyes grew unfriendly. "I know what I'm doing. He'll come to his senses."

"Suppose he goes out of his senses? It does happen, you know. This sort of thing is as dangerous as carrying a lighted match to look for a leak in a gasoline tank."

"Then you are on his side?"

"I'm thinking of you at the moment. You should reach some sort of compromise with Paul before someone gets hurt. Remember, I've had considerable experience in these situations in court. Almost every crime could be averted if one human being, usually the victim, did not stubbornly insist on putting too much pressure on another—"

John was shocked into silence by sudden peals of laughter.

"Forgive me, Uncle John, but it's so funny!" gasped Marcia. "You actually think — you are seriously suggesting—that Paul would try to *murder* me?"

Now the word was spoken out loud, shrilly, in the light of day. Murder! And Marcia herself was the first to utter it, giving it that substance and power he had hoped to avoid.

"Is it so very funny?" John asked.

"Forgive me." Marcia wiped her eyes. "I couldn't help it. If it were anyone but you, Uncle John, I would think you were trying to scare me into divorcing Paul. But I don't scare easily."

"Then you're not afraid?"

"Afraid of Paul? Of course not! I know Paul so well."

"Does any human being really know another human being?"

"A wife knows her husband," returned Marcia crisply. "This thing was pure accident."

With a sickening heart John saw that she meant it. The very suggestion of violence in ordinary life was melodramatic, out of key with all the rest, and, therefore, grotesque, unbelievable. Marcia was too vain to believe that anyone could hate her enough to kill her. Wasn't that the inevitable human response? How could anyone want to murder anyone else as admirable and sympathetic as I know myself to be? No doubt every murder vic-

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tim had believed that up to his very last breath.

John rose and moved toward the stairs. At the newel post he halted. "Marcia, tell me one thing. Who is this man, Harvey Graham?"

"How should I know? I never heard of him until Rachel brought him here last night."

"Wasn't he the man on the train with you?"

Marcia frowned impatiently. "I told you I was alone on the train, and I was. This is a strange fancy of yours. You haven't mentioned it to Paul, have you?"

"No. I promised you I wouldn't. And I won't. But don't deceive Paul, Marcia. It might be deadly dangerous."

She laughed again, lightly, with more control. "Don't worry! I can take care of myself!"

After luncheon John was reading in the garden, when Dr. Kopeck came strolling through the trees. He paused. "You look troubled."

"It's this book. Balzac." John began to read aloud: *"Courts and tribunals can do nothing to prevent crime; their sole function is to deal with crimes once these are committed."*

Kopeck perched on the garden wall. "If a man were sure a murder was going to be committed, he could go to the police. They would give the potential victim police protection until the murderer struck, and then they would arrest him."

"But suppose the so-called victim is not the person you want to protect?" answered John quietly. "In every murder there are two victims: the killed and the killer. It is the second victim, the killer, who suffers most. It's all over in a moment for the victim, but the murderer has to live through a long purgatory of suspicion, trial, imprisonment, and execution. Suppose it is this second victim, the potential murderer, you want to protect from the tragedy of ending his life as a murderer for the sake of a worthless victim. In such a case what could the police do before the fact? They would throw up their hands and say, 'We're not paid to protect murderers!' What could you do?"

"I see your point," mused Kopeck. "The police would be no help at all. You couldn't warn the potential victim without bringing about the very thing you were trying to avoid—trouble for the potential murderer. Neither could you warn the potential murderer. Before the fact, he wouldn't believe himself capable of such a thing. There's really nothing anyone could do in such a case but pray."

Kopeck rose with a shrug. "Are you coming over to Rachel's swimming pool this afternoon?"

"Yes." John put down his book. "I'll follow you as soon as I get my suit."

The pool was lined with turquoise blue tiles that gave the water

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an azure cast. Shade trees were planted on three sides and turf came down to the tiled border. On the fourth side stood a comfortable cabaña, its porch built out to the edge of the pool. The wicker chairs with foot-rests and waterproof cushions were an invitation to laziness. This afternoon a silver shaker, already dull with frost, stood on the low table near the water's edge. Beside it, a radio, plugged into the porch outlet, was playing waltz music.

Harvey Graham sprawled in one of the chairs, a glass in the hand that kept time to the music. Swimming shorts revealed muscles running to fat and a chest matted with coarse, sandy hair. Marcia sat beside him, in a white bathing suit, a beach coat draped around her shoulders.

John came through the trees. He was hardly aware of voices until Marcia cried out suddenly, "I tell you, he *was* on the train. He saw us."

Harvey's answer rumbled, "How much did he see? And—"

A sudden silence told John they had sighted him. "Am I too late for the swimming party?" he asked, smiling.

"Oh, no. Harvey and I were early. Cocktail, Uncle John?"

"No, thank you. I'm not drinking these days."

"Why?" The tone was insolent. So was the long, inquisitive look that Harvey gave him.

Marcia seemed aware of constraint and anxious to dissipate it. She said briskly, "I'm going in. Ready, Harvey?"

"Not yet. I'm going to finish this drink first."

Marcia tossed her beach coat on the chair she had left and ran along the springboard lightly. She bounced once, then launched herself into the water with a quick, clean dive.

Harvey laughed unpleasantly. "Showing off! That stuff is corny."

John thought he was still referring to the dive until the other man reached across to the radio dial and cut off the waltz from *Faust*. There was a shriek of static, then a nasal tenor came through, chanting to a background of tuneless syncopation.

"That's more like it," said Harvey with satisfaction. "Hot."

John went into one of the dressing rooms in the cabaña to change. When he came back Harvey was poised for a dive. His heavy splash spattered John's legs.

A low laugh came close to John's ear. He turned, to find Rachel and Kopeck, both in bathing suits. "Charming fellow, isn't he?" murmured Kopeck.

Rachel sat on the edge of the pool, dangling her legs. "Dear Mr. Cadmus, I suppose you can remember when people really did live according to a code."

"This generation has no idea how much wear and tear on nerves and temper can be saved by a code of

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manners," returned John. "There are so many things that can't come under the jurisdiction of law or morals. But, today, anything goes, as long as it's legal."

"And some things that are not legal," added Rachel. "Who hasn't broken a traffic law or a liquor regulation?"

"That's quibbling," said Kopeck. "There are some laws no normal person will break even today. Like the law against murder."

There was that word again. Every conversation seemed to come around to it now as if it were fermenting in other minds besides John's.

Paul came out of the cabaña. He seemed surprised to see John in a bathing suit. "Are you really going in?"

"Why not? On such a hot day? I assure you that my doctor's told me that would be all right."

John started to walk down the pool to the shallow end. Rachel's Irish terrier followed him, and Rachel called, "Here, Tippy! Come back!"

After the first plunge the water felt warm to John. He stood waist-deep and turned to look back at the cabaña. Harvey was on the porch again, pouring himself another drink. Paul stood beside Kopeck and Rachel, leaning on the back of the chair where Marcia had left her beach coat. Christine and Minna were just coming out of the cabaña. Marcia was swimming toward the ladder at the deep end of the pool.

John noticed an inflated rubber ball afloat beside him. Idly, he pushed it and it richoted across the water.

That was too much for the little dog. Barking, he leaped into the pool, splashing, frog fashion, after the ball. Rachel's voice rose above the crash of the music. "Tippy! Come here!"

"I'll get him." Marcia was leaving the pool, climbing the ladder waist-deep in water. She paused to collar the excited puppy and hand him, squirming, up to Rachel. He licked Rachel's chin and jumped out of her arms, racing along the tiles toward the shallow end where John stood.

"I'll head him off!" John made for the ladder at his end and started to climb. He was halfway up when he heard a splash, and turned, to see the dog in the water again.

Marcia shouted above the blast of music, "I'll go after him, Uncle John!"

Paul straightened up, pushing aside the chair he was leaning against.

Like something in a slow-motion nightmare, the small, light radio lurched and toppled off the low table into the water. The hideous crashing music ceased in the middle of a bar. The silence was like sudden deafness. The small dog, so irrepressively alive an instant ago, floated in the pool, motionless.

For a moment John could not

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move or breathe. Then he heard a voice. "Why, he's dead! What happened?" It was Marcia's voice.

Air filled John's lungs again. He turned his head. Marcia was standing on the other ladder, both feet on the first rung above the water. But only an instant ago she had been waist-deep in water, poised to dive after the puppy.

"Tippy!" Rachel's anguish smashed the silence. "But any one of us might have been in the pool."

Marcia spoke hoarsely, "What happened?"

"The same thing that happens when a radio falls into a bathtub of water." John stepped off the ladder and walked toward her. "Water is a conductor. In a tub or pool it's connected with the ground by a metal pipe, and metal is also a conductor. So the circuit in the radio is grounded instantly, and any living thing in the water is electrocuted."

"And—" Marcia was still dazed. "I had only just stepped out of the water!"

"Yes." John let the word lie between them for a moment. "Your feet were wet, so was the rubber pad on the step where you stood. But the wooden step under the rubber was dry. So was the wooden railing under your hand. That saved you, but you escaped death only by inches."

"It would have been an accident, wouldn't it?"

"Yes." John's eyes held hers. "It would have been an accident. What else could it be?"

They were walking together now toward the cabaña. Christine and Minna had taken Rachel inside. Paul, Kopeck, and Harvey were standing around the coffee table.

"It was the cord," said Paul. "You see? It was lying under one of the front legs of that chair I was leaning on. I couldn't see it because Marcia's coat was draped over the chair. When I stood up and pushed the chair aside, the chair leg jerked the cord, and the cord pulled the radio forward over the edge of the table into the water."

"If the extension cord had been only a few inches shorter, the weight of the radio would have pulled the plug out of the socket as it fell toward the water." Kopeck kicked the long, looped coil of insulated wire on the floor. "But this—there was too much slack."

"I'll fish out the radio," added Paul, "and the poor little pup."

"You might have had to fish me out, too!" Marcia's laugh was high. "What I'd like to know is: Who put that radio so near the edge of the water? And how did the cord get under a chair leg?"

"Anyone might have done it," said John quickly. "I don't suppose anyone will remember doing it consciously."

"No." Marcia was bitter. "I don't suppose anyone will."

"What we all need is another

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drink!" Harvey reached for the shaker. "Empty! For Pete's sake!"

John would have gone with the others if Marcia had not detained him with a light touch on the forearm. "Uncle John." Water had washed her face clean of powder. Around her painted mouth the flesh was a ghastly, bluish white. "You warned me, didn't you?"

John answered wearily, "You shouldn't take an old man's morbid fancy too seriously. No one could have counted on all these things happening in the right sequence."

"But they didn't. The plan failed. I'm still alive."

"You cannot prove there was a plan. If you make such a charge without proof you will just cause trouble."

"What about the window this morning? Was that an accident?"

"You, yourself, thought so at the time."

"I was pretty naive, wasn't I? I know better now. Twice in one day can't be coincidence."

"Be careful that you don't simply make things worse. I wouldn't talk about this at all if I were you."

"Why not? That's one way of protecting myself!"

John felt a little sick. What would Marcia do now? Had he been a fool to try to warn her? Instead of saving Paul, or Marcia herself, he had simply put Paul more deeply in her power than ever, and so stepped up the pressure that Marcia was already putting on Paul. There was nothing she might not do.

John made one last effort. "Marcia, there is only one way you can spare yourself and Paul. Let him get this divorce."

"So that's it." Marcia took a step back, mouth tight, eyes glaring. "You and Paul are trying to frighten me."

"That's not it at all," said John wearily. "I don't know what Paul is doing. I haven't talked to him as I have to you."

"You're not really worried about me. You're worried about Paul."

"That's true. After all, he is my nephew. Almost my son. But that doesn't mean I can't see your side of it, too."

Marcia looked down at her bathing suit, tracing the brocaded white pattern with one forefinger. "I think you were right from the first, Uncle John. These things that happened today were not accidents. Yet even now I can't quite believe Paul would do things like that." She looked at him slyly. "Can you?"

"I have that same feeling," admitted John. "It's not real. I can't believe it. But I can't think of anyone else who— Can you?"

"No." But her voice was uncertain and her eyes fled from his. "I can't think of anyone else who would have the—well, guts, nerve, whatever you want to call it. I'll have to ask Paul for a settlement and get out. I don't want alimony.

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I want capital. He can sell the house for forty or fifty thousand and give me the money. What's more, he'll have to do it before I start divorce proceedings, not afterward."

Some undertone in her voice made John uneasy. "Is this all you've been planning from the first, Marcia? To make trouble for Paul, and then refuse a divorce until he became so desperate he would beggar himself to be rid of you?"

She looked up. Her eyes were enigmatic. Suddenly the smallest of smiles touched her lips lightly. She spoke softly. "No, Uncle John. This isn't all I've been planning." She sprang to her feet. "I'm cold. Let's get dressed."

That night Marcia slept soundly until a dream woke her. She had no idea of the time. She lay in her bed watching the moonlight shining through the window, thinking of the dreary dinner that evening: Paul, silent and tired, oddly suspicious, as if he were searching everything she said for hidden meaning; Uncle John, sad and anxious and uncertain of himself, as if he feared he had blundered in talking to her so frankly. Paul had gone out after dinner, leaving Uncle John more troubled than ever.

Marcia had been glad to escape to her own room as soon as she decently could. No doubt that was why she had awakened. She had gone to sleep too early. Now she was wide-awake and restless. She smiled a little, recalling Harvey Graham's cure-all: *What we all need is another drink . . .* Not such a bad idea.

Still smiling, Marcia slid out of bed and slipped her feet into high-heeled mules, the same apricot as the soft, satin brocade dressing gown she put on. After an automatic glance of satisfaction at her mirror, she went out of the room. She didn't try to muffle the castanet click of her heels. As usual, she wasn't thinking of others.

Downstairs in the living-room she switched on a lamp and opened a window to let in the cool night air. There was a decanter with brandy on the coffee table. She found a glass and filled it. She sat down at the desk. The handiest paper was a pile of unpaid bills on the stick-file. She pulled them off and scribbled on the back of the first one: "House—$40,000."

It was then that she heard a footstep. She wasn't sure whether it was at the open window or on the stairs. She dropped her pen and pivoted in her chair to look back over her shoulder. Her voice was flat, slightly contemptuous, as she spoke the last words she was ever to utter:

"Oh . . . It's only you."

(*continued on page 90*)

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A Do-It-Yourself riddle story . . . be sure not to miss the Editors' Note at the end of the story – but read the story first, please . . .

WHAT WAS IN THE BOX?

by RICHARD MATHESON

OLD MR. HAWKINS USED TO STAND by his picket fence and call to the little boys when they were coming home from school.

"Lad!" he would call. "Come here, lad!"

Most of the little boys were afraid to go near him, so they laughed and made fun of him in voices that shook. Then they ran away and told their friends how brave they'd been. But once in a while a boy would go up to Mr. Hawkins when he called, and Mr. Hawkins would make his strange request.

That was how the verse got started:

Dig me a hole, he says,
Winking his eyes,
And you will find
A big surprise.

No one knew how long they'd heard the children chanting it. Sometimes the parents seemed to recall having heard it years ago.

Once a little boy started to dig the hole but he got tired after a while and he didn't find any big surprise. He was the only one who had ever tried . . .

One day Ernie Willaker was coming home from school with two of his friends. They walked on the other side of the street when they saw Mr. Hawkins in his front yard standing by the picket fence.

"Lad!" they heard him call. "Come here, lad!"

"He means you, Ernie," teased one of the boys.

"He does not," said Ernie.

Mr. Hawkins pointed a finger at Ernie. "Come here, lad!" he called.

Ernie glanced nervously at his friends.

"Go on," said one of them. "What're ya scared of?"

"Who's scared?" said Ernie. "My ma says I have to come home right after school is all."

"Yella," said his other friend. "You're scared of old man Hawkins."

"Who's scared!"

"Go *on* then."

"Lad!" called Mr. Hawkins. "Come here, lad."

"Well." Ernie hesitated. "Don't *go* nowhere," he said.

"We won't. We'll stick around."

"Well . . ." Ernie braced himself

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and crossed the street, trying to look casual. He shifted his books to his left hand and brushed back his hair with his right. *Dig me a hole, he says,* muttered in his brain.

Ernie stepped up to the picket fence. "Yes, sir?" he asked.

"Come closer, lad," the old man said, his dark eyes shining.

Ernie took a forward step.

"Now you aren't afraid of Mister Hawkins, are you?" said the old man winking.

"No, sir," Ernie said.

"Good," said the old man. "Now listen, lad. How would you like a big surprise?"

Ernie glanced across his shoulder. His friends were still there. He grinned at them. Suddenly he gasped as a gaunt hand clamped over his right arm. "Hey, leggo!" Ernie cried out.

"Take it easy, lad," soothed Mr. Hawkins. "No one's going to hurt you."

Ernie tugged. Tears sprang into his eyes as the old man drew him closer. From the corner of an eye Ernie saw his two friends running down the street.

"L-leggo," Ernie sobbed.

"Shortly," said the old man. "Now then, would you like a big surprise?"

"N-no, thanks, mister."

"Sure you would," said Mr. Hawkins. Ernie smelled his breath and tried to pull away, but Mr. Hawkins's grip was like iron.

"You know where Mr. Miller's field is?" asked Mr. Hawkins.

"Y-yeah."

"You know where the big oak tree is?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I know."

"You go to the oak tree in Mr. Miller's field and face toward the church steeple. You understand?"

"Y-y-yeah."

The old man drew him closer. "You stand there and you walk ten paces. You understand? Ten paces."

"Yeah . . ."

"You walk ten paces and you dig down ten feet. *How many feet?*" He prodded Ernie's chest with a bony finger.

"T-ten," said Ernie.

"That's it," said the old man. "Face the steeple, walk ten paces, dig ten feet—and there'll you'll find a big surprise." He winked at Ernie. "Will you do it, lad?"

"I . . . yeah, sure. *Sure.*"

Mr. Hawkins let go and Ernie jumped away. His arm felt completely numb.

"Don't forget, now," the old man said.

Ernie whirled and ran down the street as fast as he could. He found his friends waiting at the corner.

"Did he try and murder you?" one of them whispered.

"Nanh," said Ernie, "He ain't so m-much."

"What'd he want?"

"What d'ya s'pose?"

They started down the street, all chanting it.

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Dig me a hole, he said,
Winking his eyes,
And you will find
A big surprise.

Every afternoon they went to Mr. Miller's field and sat under the big oak tree.

"You think there's somethin' down there really?"

"Nanh."

"What if there *was* though?"

"What?"

"Gold, maybe."

They talked about it every day, and every day they faced the steeple and walked ten paces. They stood on the spot and scuffed the earth with the tips of their sneakers.

"You s'pose there's gold down there really?"

"Why should he tell us?"

"Yeah, why not dig it up himself?"

"Because he's too old, stupid."

"Yeah? Well, if there's gold down there we split it three ways."

They became more and more curious. At night they dreamed about gold. They wrote *gold* in their schoolbooks. They thought about all the things they could buy with gold. They started walking past Mr. Hawkins's house to see if he'd call them again and they could ask him if it was gold. But he never called them.

Then, one day, they were coming home from school and they saw Mr. Hawkins talking to another boy.

"He told us *we* could have the gold!" said Ernie.

"Yeah!" they stormed angrily. "Let's go!"

They ran to Ernie's house and Ernie went down to the cellar and got shovels. They ran up the street, over lots, across the dump, and into Mr. Miller's field. They stood under the oak tree, faced the steeple, and paced ten times.

"Dig," said Ernie.

Their shovels sank into the black earth. They dug without speaking, breath whistling through their nostrils. When the hole was about three feet deep, they rested.

"You think there's gold down there really?"

"I don't know but we're gonna find out before that other kid does."

"Yeah!"

"Hey, how we gonna get out if we dig ten feet?" one of them said.

"We'll cut out steps," said Ernie.

They started digging again. For over an hour they shoveled out the cool, wormy earth and piled it high around the hole. It stained their clothes and their skin. When the hole was over their heads one of them went to get a pail and a rope. Ernie and the other boy kept digging and throwing the earth out of the hole. After a while the dirt rained back on their heads and they stopped. They sat on the damp earth wearily, waiting for the other boy to come back. Their hands and arms were brown with earth.

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"How far're we down?" wondered the boy.

"Six feet," estimated Ernie.

The other boy came back and they started working again. They kept digging and digging until their bones ached.

"Aaah, the heck with it," said the boy who was pulling up the pail. "There ain't nothin' down there."

"He said ten feet," Ernie insisted.

"Well, I'm quittin'," said the boy.

"You're yella!"

"Tough," said the boy.

Ernie turned to the boy beside him. "You'll have to pull the dirt up," he said.

"Oh . . . okay," muttered the boy.

Ernie kept digging. When he looked up now, it seemed as if the sides of the hole were shaking and it was all going to cave in on him. He was trembling with fatigue.

"Come on," the other boy finally called down. "There ain't nothin' down there. You dug ten feet."

"Not yet," gasped Ernie.

"How deep ya goin', *China?*"

Ernie leaned against the side of the hole and gritted his teeth. A fat worm crawled out of the earth and tumbled to the bottom of the hole.

"I'm goin' home," said the other boy. "I'll catch it if I'm late for supper."

"You're yella too," said Ernie miserably.

"Aaaah . . . *tough.*"

Ernie twisted his shoulders painfully. "Well, the gold is all mine," he called up.

"There ain't no gold," said the other boy.

"Tie the rope to something so I can get out when I find *the gold,*" said Ernie.

The boy snickered. He tied the rope to a bush and let it dangle down into the hole. Ernie looked up and saw the crooked rectangle of darkening sky. The boy's face appeared, looking down.

"You better not get stuck down there," he said.

"I ain't gettin' stuck." Ernie looked down angrily and drove the shovel into the ground. He could feel his friend's eyes on his back.

"Ain't you scared?" asked the other boy.

"What of?" snapped Ernie without looking up.

"I dunno," said the boy.

Ernie dug.

"Well," said the boy, "I'll see ya."

Ernie grunted. He heard the boy's footsteps move away. He looked around the hole and a faint whimper sounded in his throat. He felt cold.

"Well, I ain't leavin'," he mumbled. The gold was his. He wasn't going to leave it for that other kid.

He dug furiously, piling the dirt on the other side of the hole. It kept getting darker.

"A little more," he told himself, gasping. "Then I'm goin' home with the gold."

He stepped hard on the shovel

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and there was a hollow sound beneath him. Ernie felt a shudder running up his back. He forced himself to keep on digging. Will I give *them* the horse laugh, he thought. Will I give *them*—

He had uncovered part of a box—a long box. He stood there looking down at the wood and shivering. *And you will find*—

Quivering, Ernie stood on top of the box and stamped on it. A deeply hollow sound struck his ears. He dug away more earth and his shovel scraped on the ancient wood. He couldn't uncover the entire box—it was too long.

Then he saw that the box had a two-part cover and there was a clasp on each part.

Ernie clenched his teeth and struck at the clasp with the edge of his shovel. Half of the cover opened.

Ernie screamed. He fell back against the earth wall and stared in voiceless horror at the contents of the box—

Challenge to the reader

. . . and a $25 prize

What was in the box?

For the most interesting answer in the opinion of the judges (the editorial staff of EQMM), we will award a prize of $25. All answers must be submitted on a post card, and must be mailed to Box Contest, Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, 527 Madison Avenue, New York 22, New York, no later than April 5, 1959. No post cards can be returned, and the decision of the judges will be accepted by all contestants as final. You may write, or type, one word or as many words as you can legibly put on one side of a post card.

What was in the box?

Perhaps a single word will bring you $25 . . .

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A fascinating peek into history-that-might-have-been, and a charming story, its title notwithstanding . . .

THE MURDER OF GEORGE WASHINGTON

by RICHARD M. GORDON

My family has resided in New York for many generations. My grandfather's grandfather, Anthony Porter, for whom I am named, lent his team on December 21st, 1820, when the Mortier House, Richmond Hill, was moved along Varick Street to the corner of Charlton in what is now the financial district of the city. The old mansion had served as George Washington's headquarters from June to September, 1776. During the move, a letter was found behind a loose brick in the kitchen chimney. It was addressed to Lieutenant-General Sir William Howe, commander of the British forces around New York, and dated July 29th, 1776. For reasons unknown, the Tory courier to whom its delivery was entrusted failed to take it from its hiding place, and it never reached its destination.

My ancestor kept it as a souvenir. The succeeding generations of Porters looked more to the future than to the past, so the family papers have gathered dust these many years. I, however, am the last of my line, unmarried, with no prospect of posterity, and my interest has turned more and more to the times of my forebears.

From the first time I saw it, the letter has fascinated and puzzled me:

Esteemed & Respected Sir:

By the time this letter reaches you, you will already know the full import of the news it bears. George Washington will be dead, and the vile rebellion he leads will, like a serpent without its head, thresh about for a time, but there will be no harm in it, and it will die at sunset. I will be dead too, but that is of little note to any but myself and my family.

From my position as cook in General Washington's establishment, I have been able in the past to provide you with information concerning the Rebels' plans and troop dispositions. I am now able to render a much more important service to the Crown. The General, a man of aloof character and much troubled with his teeth, dines often alone. Of late, he has been afflicted with a cold in his head which has seriously impaired his sense of taste. Tonight, for his evening meal, I have prepared a ragout of beef, onion, and potato, and a special ingredient of my own, the scarlet flesh of the fruit of a variety of the deadly nightshade.

It is a difficult act to commit; I am an honourable man, and I have

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never injured any person by stealth or trickery. Moreover, General Washington is a leader whom, in a just cause, it would be a privilege to follow to the Gate of Hell itself. He is a gentleman of great dignity and commanding presence; his integrity is legendary; and his valour, resourcefulness, and resolution are well known to you, Sir William. Yet, he is engaged in a traitorous revolt against the Godgiven rule of King George, and it is my duty as a loyal subject of the Crown to strike him down by any method that presents itself to me. I shall kill him with regret, both for the manner of his dying and for his death itself, but in the knowledge that I am doing right for God, for King, and for country.

Later

The deed is done! I have delivered the General's death into the hands of the General's serving-man, and now, having completed the King's business, I shall proceed about my own. I shall leave this letter in the appointed place, and, as I fear the brutish revenge of the base renegades of the General's command, I shall take my own life. As a cook, I have a prejudice against dying by poison; I am too corpulent to hang; but, by reason of my calling, I am expert with a carving knife.

And so, farewell. I commend the support of my wife and children to the generosity of King George, and, in your care, Sir William, I leave the fate of my name and reputation. I have served you well.

With great and very sincere regard and respect, I remain—or I should say rather—I was, Dear Sir,

Your Most Obedt & Very Hble Servt.

(signed) Jas. Bailey

Here we have described in detail the most important assassination since that of Julius Caesar. The only fallacy with the whole affair is that it never happened. We know that George Washington lived twenty-three years more, until 1799; there is no record anywhere of even an unsuccessful attempt on his life in July 1776. And yet, James Bailey killed himself in remorse and in fear of reprisal for a murder he did not commit.

I set myself the task of explaining this paradox. When is a murder not a murder? The question kept running through my head like the foolish childhood riddle: "When is a door not a door?" When is a poison not a poison? A fruit with scarlet flesh . . . That was the key. I started my inquiry there.

I finally discovered a plant in the nightshade family that has scarlet fruit. In America it was popularly considered poisonous as late as 1825. It was, and is—the tomato.

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a new story by

JOHN COLLIER

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**JOHN COLLIER**
TITLE:	***Anniversary Gift***
TYPE:	Crime Story
LOCALE:	Florida
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Mr. Jensen's marriage had not turned out the way he had planned it. Instead of pursuing happiness, he found himself pursuing pets. Indeed, his Eden lacked only one — a serpent!*

"YOU MARRY THE MENTAL AGE OF ten, and you end up being a bedroom steward on a blasted Noah's ark." Mr. Jensen muttered this bitter conclusion to a toucan, whose cage he was resentfully cleaning out. He even gave the well-beaked bird a push with his scraper, to move it to the far end of its perch, so that he could scrape.

Other cages, of all shapes and sizes, stood around what was incorrectly called the patio. These, the warm wind advised him, were also in need of cleaning. Otherwise—no beer.

Mr. Jensen, when he proposed marriage to a lady as young in mind as he described, had looked forward confidently to control of the exchequer. He had failed entirely to take notice of the attitude of small girls to their pennies. From this it may be inferred that theirs was no mismating, mentally, of May and December; it might better have been described as a March-April marriage in I.Q.

What Mr. Jensen had referred to as a Noah's ark had been called, by the real estate man, a Spanish-style bungalette. The term, though harsh, was not altogether unjust. It was one of a straggle of its kind, littered like a tide-mark between the listless levels of swamp and sea on an inexpensive-looking beach in mid-Florida. The architecture,

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which would have harmonized with few other landscapes, did harmonize with this one. Both offered an illusion of attractiveness which evaporated suddenly and without trace, so there was no telling who or what had taken one in.

Years ago, when this development was dreamed up, slapped together, and sold off, the Jensens, pale and blinking from the north, gazing dazedly around at sunshine and seashine, had declared it to be quite a picture. Myra had not long signed on the dotted line when Mr. Jensen, though he was not in the very least an artist, felt obscurely that he could have done better himself. It is probable that, given a certain facility, he would have done exactly the same thing. Everything was executed in those pastel colors which are at once obvious and unbelievable. There were long, vague, horizontal smears of blues and yellows and pinks, fretted here and there by the easily drawn palmetto, and enlivened by the all-too-simple pelican—a cute touch, but one which soon lost its appeal.

When these weak and leaky pleasure-boxes were first run up, three coconut palms and a bougainvillea had been planted in each skimpy lot. The purpose was to provide glamor. This objective had not been achieved. After ten years, the beach colony looked cheaper than ever and, even more distressing, it was no longer cheap at all. The Jensens had been washed up there on the tepid wave of Myra's low fixed income; that pillowing billow had sunk beneath them, and now, like stranded jellyfish, they found it uncomfortable to remain and impossible to depart.

Mr. Jensen longed desperately to depart. He longed for Brooklyn. It may be observed of nostalgia that the less agreeable its object, the more valid and the more excruciating its pang. Mr. Jensen frequently said he wanted a real saloon and a decent delicatessen, but the howling within and the physical pain in his chest were oftenest evoked by an idea of the grimy wind blowing off the River and expectorations frozen on the sidewalk.

Sometimes he experienced a species of olfactory mirage; he seemed to snuff up again the snug fume of the one-Swede apartment house, where he, as doorman, elevator man, and janitor, had been the one Swede. Myra, newly widowed of her builder spouse, cut off in more or less his youth before he had had time to make the builder's postwar pile, had come there with her low fixed income, and there Mr. Jensen had wooed, won, and married her for it. Now, possibly for want of petting, that warm-hearted woman had taken intemperately to pets.

"First a lot of stinking animals! Then a lot of squawking birds! And now, by Jiminy, if she isn't kissing a turtle!"

Mrs. Jensen, her extremely light housekeeping already postponed,

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was in truth lying in a long chair on the porch, clad in a playsuit rich in humor and suspense, and she was lavishing caresses on the outworks and bastions of the newly acquired reptile, which had coyly retreated its head into its shell. It was this ingenious lady's misfortune that her many pets, beginning with Mr. Jensen himself, had all found her endearments a little overwhelming, and had turned aside or drawn back their heads, and ended up in the collection of jerry-built cages in the patio.

"Like an addict!" said Mr. Jensen. "Like a dope fiend! Lower all the time! All I can say is, you can't say she isn't asking for it!"

The toucan could not say this. According to the limitations of its kind, it could say nothing at all. No doubt it had its thoughts, but no one ever knows what a toucan is thinking of, except perhaps during April and May. It may be hazarded, however, that this one thought very little of Mr. Jensen. Indeed, had it been as talkative as a parrot, as wise as an owl, as hawkeyed as a hawk, and as burned-up, over the push with the scraper, as a phoenix, it might conceivably have expressed itself as follows:

"Can the moral indignation, Jensen! You are trying to work yourself up. You are trying to nerve yourself to a deed altogether beyond your capacity. My advice to you is – *don't!* Throw away that scrap of newspaper with the small ad in it! Abandon your dangerous dream! Don't talk to me of freedom! Freedom, my friend, is strictly for the birds. Take a look at these! They are wings. What are yours? I thought so, and I need say no more.

"What I will say, however, is that you are in no way equipped to carry out the abominable enterprise you have in mind. Your brain is sluggish, your nerves are shot, your judgment is poor, you are deplorably overweight, and your chlorestorol level is perilously high. Consider—far worse!—the darkness, the depth, and the wide extent, like night over the Matto Grosso, of your ignorance. Look around you at the limitless panorama of the things you *don't* know. One or another of these may make all the difference between success and failure. You are ignorant of almost everything I can think of, even during April and May. You disagree on this last point? Then appeal to Mrs. Jensen.

"Let us get down to concrete examples. You don't know your reptiles. You have just mistaken a common gopher tortoise for a turtle. Your values are all wrong; you implied that the reptile, *qua* reptile, is low. It is true that, like you, it has no feathers, but you forget that, like me, it can lay an egg. You may, of course, do something in the latter line if you persist in your foolhardy project, but that will be only in a figurative sense, and it

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will add nothing at all to your credit or your comfort. And, speaking of comfort, there are several things about the service around here . . ."

But we need follow no further this purely hypothetical discourse of the toucan, for it was not endowed with the necessary qualifications, and therefore it didn't say a single word. This was a great pity, for it is more than likely that a frank talk more or less along these lines would have had very considerable weight with Mr. Jensen.

Instead, unfortunately, the wind shifted a point or two toward the southwest, and Mr. Jensen was assailed by the hot breath of the Great Cypress Swamp, a district from which emanates a moral as well as a physical halitosis. A smell of ooze, a smell of serpents, a smell of darkness, a smell of decay! Mr. Jensen was not the first man, nor the beach colony the first Eden, to be exposed to this insidious influence.

He was at once afflicted by a vision, as piercing as a toothache, of sleet and skyscrapers. The unreal lineaments of a real saloon rose up about him. He lifted his eyes to the heights of shadowy apartment houses where the janitor was authorized to insist that no pets of any sort were allowed.

The next moment the mirage faded, and, after the fashion of fading mirages, it left its victim more lost, more desperate, than before. The Great Cypress Swamp got him on the rebound, which was exactly according to plan. The Great Cypress Swamp did not, through the agency of its pestilential messenger, fill his ear with a long sales talk about how dignified, how comfortable, how independent, how well supplied with the best of beer and delicatessen a single Swede might be, who was in a position to add, to the emoluments and perquisites of doorman, elevator operator, and janitor, a low fixed income entirely his own. The Great Cypress Swamp leaves all that sort of thing to the individual, who never lets it down. The Great Cypress Swamp has one message, and one message only, for mankind. It says, as softly as a demonic prompter, "What the hell!"

"What the hell!" said Mr. Jensen, and straightening up, he left the scraper among the scrapings and padded over to where his wife lay in her chair. She was peering wistfully in at the tortoise, which wore an expression of reserve and showed no inclination to come out and play.

"The pet shop said they're affectionate," she complained. "He seems kind of self-centered to me."

"I told you don't get a lousy turtle," rejoined her spouse. "You fall for any line these fellows hand you. Let me tell you something, Myra. I've been thinking. You know what you ought to do, honey? You ought to get yourself a snake."

"Cold-blooded again!" objected

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Mrs. Jensen. "I guess when they're cold-blooded they don't ever get real fond of you. Look at him! He's gone right inside."

"You don't want to judge everything by a turtle," said Mr. Jensen. "How can a snake go inside? Where could it go? And if it could, it wouldn't want to. A snake's affectionate. You get the right snake, you got yourself a real pal."

"People say they hate the sight of a snake," said Mrs. Jensen, but in a tone not entirely preclusive of sympathy for the underdog.

"That's a lot of prejudice," said Mr. Jensen. "Besides, everyone don't think that way. People that know snakes in person don't think that way at all. Remember that act in Tampa you wouldn't go in to see? *Snake Dance Strip Tease!* That dame had 'em twining all around her. There was a picture of it on the billboard."

"What do they eat, Hermie?" asked his wife, setting the tortoise on the floor, where it remained as if waiting for a long-handled broom and a porter.

"They eat an egg," said Mr. Jensen. "All you do is whistle when it's dinner time, and they sit up and beg. Some sorts eat a rabbit, but they're the big ones. What you want is a nice *little* snake."

"I could carry it around," said Mrs. Jensen tentatively.

"Sure you could," affirmed her husband. "Down the front of your dress—that's where they carry them. It could look out at people. Cute as the devil!"

"But I don't think I'd like a snake," said Mrs. Jensen, after a movement which suggested that she was, in imagination, trying one on.

"Okay!" said Mr. Jensen. "Okay, okay! Don't have one! No snake! Snake's out! *I'm* not trying to sell you any bill of goods on a snake, honey—don't get me wrong! You know what I always say: we got too much damned zoo around here already. Only seeing you were so disappointed in that no-good, do-nothing turtle . . . Well, forget it! The hell with the snake! Let 'em kill it, and skin it, and make a pair of shoes for a midget."

"You mean you know of one?" asked Mrs. Jensen.

"Of course I do," he assured her. "A fellow was telling me. He's got a pet ship in Miami, and he's stuck with this snake, and he don't know what to do with it."

"He's got to get rid of it?"

"Well, you know what the price of eggs has gone up to," said Mr. Jensen.

"Maybe he'd give it away, to a real good home?"

"A snakeskin's worth money," said Mr. Jensen. "This guy's got to eat. All the same, he said he couldn't scarcely face up to killing it. It's so damn loyal. He said it's got an eye like a dog."

"Well, I don't know," said Mrs. Jensen.

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"It takes all day to die, a snake does," continued her husband.

"Do they come very high?" asked Mrs. Jensen after a pause.

"He said twenty," said her husband, "but I got an idea I could get it for less. What d'you say, honey? Would you like me to get it for you, for a surprise?"

"Well, not *too much* of a surprise," said she.

"No," said he. "But *you* know—coming in a box. Gift-wrapped, eh? It can be for our anniversary. Give me a twenty and I'll get going right after we eat. Maybe I'll get it for ten—maybe even for five."

"I'll come with you," said Mrs. Jensen, but Mr. Jensen shook his head.

"That's where you went wrong with the turtle," he said. "He's got you tied up in his mind with the pet shop where he's been so miserable. Now look at him—all withdrawn! Like that dame in the movie, and all she needed was love and affection. Listen, if I was a snake I'd like to be put in a box and not know where I was going, and find myself being unwrapped by someone just like you, Myra, in a nice quiet room with the door shut."

"I'll have an egg ready for him," said Mrs. Jensen. "I suppose he eats it raw?"

"He'll come with directions," said her husband. "Let's get the food on the table and I'll be off as soon as we've ate."

A good husband is always eager to gratify his wife's little fancy, and Mr. Jensen was on his way almost before the end of their meal; he was still chewing as he drove out to the coastal highway. He did not, however, follow that broad and easy path into Miami, but soon took a narrower road inland, which still dwindled, like a stream nearing its source, as he penetrated deeper and deeper into the wide, vacant, and misleading smile of the country north of the Everglades. He was looking for a village called Melodie.

Now the village of Melodie is so elusive, so fugitive, that Mr. Jensen passed it three times before he realized it was there. At last he noticed a cluster of mail boxes at the entrance of a stretch of dirt which might conceivably have been called a road. The boxes, at their haphazard heights, had something of the appearance of the notes in a bar or two of music, and no doubt those notes, if sketchily whistled by a talented wayfarer, would have expressed all the sweetness and allure of the village they represented. Mr. Jensen was not musically gifted, but even to him the mail boxes expressed quite a good deal of information.

For example, they indicated that the village he was seeking must lie somewhere down the dirt road, because it could not possibly be anywhere else. The boxes also had a rustic simplicity about them, which

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gave him a new hope he might get his snake for as little as five.

He left his car on the side of the state highway, ventured down the track, and was soon rewarded by the sight of some unpretentious roofs. These lay at a little distance, on the other side of a creek, which was crossed by what was quite definitely a bridge—in fact, on one side of it there was a sort of hand-rail. One part of this hand-rail must have been much firmer than it looked, for a boy was leaning on it. He was a boy of thirteen, but rather small for his age.

On or over the bridge there were also a number of mosquitoes, of the black and day-faring type which are so interesting a feature of the locality. Mr. Jensen did not notice them at first, but they soon invited his attention.

"Is this place called Melodie?" asked Mr. Jensen. "Where'll I find the snakeologist that hangs out here?"

The small boy looked at Mr. Jensen through a pair of spectacles that seemed rounder and more uncompromising than the ordinary. "Herpetologist," he said.

"Listen, bud," said Mr. Jensen, "if ever I get the hives again I won't be coming up *this* neck of the woods for treatment, believe you me! I'm looking for the fellow that runs this ad." With that, he pulled out his scrap of newspaper, two mosquitoes taking full advantage of the moment that his hand was in his pocket. Mr. Jensen exclaimed in the vernacular, slapping his neck and his brow in rapid succession.

"Eidelpfeffer, herpetologist," said the boy. "That's me."

"You?" said Mr. Jensen staring at him in the sort of surprise that is sometimes thought to be unflattering, and was, indeed, thought to be so in this case.

"Naturalists, pet shops, museums, and medical schools supplied," quoted the youngster, without deigning to glance at the clipping. *"Live reptiles for scientific purposes. Rare collectors' items.* Want to buy one?"

"Maybe," said Mr. Jensen. "You see, son, I'm a sort of professor from up north. My experiments are going to save a lot of the human race. I've driven all the way down here to get a tip-top, high-powered poisonous snake. A real stinger."

"Professor, eh?" said the small boy who, Mr. Jensen now noted, had an air of being, mentally if not physically, somewhat older than his years. This characteristic was vaguely distasteful to Mr. Jensen, as was his wife's girlishness; perhaps he was hard to please where mental ages were concerned.

"Well, let's see," continued the village Ditmars. *"Crotalus? Crotalus adamanteus? Horridus?* Or what about *Ancistrodon?"*

"Nothing imported," said Mr. Jensen. "I want a decent, straightforward American snake like you'd

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come on in your own backyard."

"Those are rattlers and copperheads, Professor," said the boy, eyeing Mr. Jensen with a very offensive, scientific sort of expression. "I was just giving you the Latin names of them, Professor."

Fortunately Mr. Jensen was inspired by a mosquito to slap his brow at that very moment. This not only relieved a certain frustration but it also cued him to the dramatic mimicry of a scientist who has absent-mindedly mislaid his Latin. The interpretation would have done credit to a student of the Method. "Why, sure! Of course!" he said. "Don't know what I'm thinking of, what with these damn mosquitoes buzzing me all of the time! But look, kid, I'm not interested in a rattler. I want something with a bit of class to it—little and cute, yet with plenty of zip."

The boy ruminated for a little. "Well, Professor," he said at last, "I wonder what you'd say to *Tyrannosaurus Rex?*"

"I came here," cried Mr. Jensen, "for a yard of snake, not a yard of highbrow talk. If you've got something like what I said, let's do business. If not, say so, and don't keep me standing here getting bit."

"I know what you want," said the boy. "You want a Coral snake."

"How's that for size?"

"Twenty inches."

"Packs a high grade of poison?"

"It certainly does."

"Good-looking?"

"It's got bands around it—red, black, and yellow. It looks like the King snake, and that's the best looking species there is. Here you are!" And the boy fished out a slim handbook from the hip pocket of his jeans and showed Mr. Jensen at attractive color-print of the reptile. "Read what it says. Deadliest type of poison in North or South America. Akin to that of the cobra."

"That's my baby!" said Mr. Jensen, well pleased.

"What do you want it for?" asked the boy.

Mosquitoes and questions are one of the worst combinations in the world. "They've got no right," said Mr. Jensen, "to let a kid advertise. Here's the country needing scientists, and my time being wasted driving all the way down here to talk to a runty, four-eyed, question-asking little punk who don't know a snake from a tapeworm! Keep your snake and I'll keep my top secret information—and my dough as well." With that he turned away.

He had not gone far, however, when, the picture of the snake being very clear in his mind's eye, and its colors and general equipment appealing to him very strongly, and reflecting that he had no idea where he might find another, he swallowed his resentment and turned back to the bridge.

"Listen, pal," he said, "let's make ourselves a deal. How do you sell 'em? A little bitsy one like that

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can't come so very high, I guess? Three bucks? Four? You know, son, they don't give us scientists all the dough in the world to toss around. Gee, if I'd had four bucks all to myself when I was your age, I'd have been right on top of the world!" And Mr. Jensen gave this boy, absolutely free of charge, and with no strings attached, a big, wide, warm, genial man-to-man smile. "Four bucks, eh?" he wheedled.

Alas, the ungrateful child was sharper than the teeth of the serpents in which he dealt. He turned his round, unresponsive spectacles on Mr. Jensen, and these spectacles, in spite of their chilly detachment, seemed to peer into the deepest recesses of that gentleman's heart, or, at the very least, of his pocketbook. And sure enough, when Pint-size at last condescended to acknowledge the offer, he uttered only one word, but that was right on the button. "Twenty."

It would be tedious to rehearse each of the dolorous steps by which Mr. Jensen slowly climbed from the low level of his original offer up the almost vertical face of this dreadful boy's clifflike indifference. That cliff had to be climbed, however, because, as another mountaineer said of another Everest, it was there. Even so, had he not been goaded by the mosquitoes, Mr. Jensen might never have made it. In the end he clinched the bargain at eighteen fifty—this to include a trustworthy box in which to carry the reptile home. The boy retired to a shed in the backyard of one of the shacks and soon returned with a neat green carton and a dollar fifty in change.

Mr. Jensen quitted the company of Master Eidelpfeffer and the mosquitoes without profuse thanks or farewells. He felt, with some justice, that both had put the bite on him. He glanced back when he reached the turn in the dirt road, and the boy was looking after him with a peculiar expression. Nothing is more upsetting, when one is engaged in an operation of great delicacy, than to be looked at with a peculiar expression.

Mr. Jensen breathed hard as he drove home. There was a small bar at the junction of the inland road with Highway No. 1. Outside, it presented the refreshing appearance of half a grapefruit; within, it was as cold, and nearly as dark, as the inside of a deep freeze. It had an atmosphere of the greatest refinement, distinction, and exclusiveness —this was achieved by having the juke box turned extremely low.

In this retreat Mr. Jensen killed half an hour, four bottles of ice-cold beer, and his dollar fifty. It was his purpose to arrive home at exactly six o'clock, that being the hour when Mrs. Jensen changed from her playsuit into whatever she decided to wear at the evening meal.

Passing through the patio, Mr.

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Jensen looked at the toucan, and the toucan looked at Mr. Jensen. Nothing was said—at least, nothing vocal.

Mr. Jensen went on into the house, and into the marital chamber where, as he expected, his wife, rosy from the bath, was dimming the highlights a little by the application of a delicious talcum powder, strongly scented with violets. "If this snake likes violets," thought Mr. Jensen, "we're in business."

"Here we are, honey!" he said to his wife. "Here's your surprise."

"Oh, thank you, Hermie!" said Mrs. Jensen happily. But then, her face falling a little, she said, "I thought you were going to get it gift-wrapped."

"The guy where I got this snake," said Mr. Jensen somberly, "was all out of gift-wrapping paper."

"Never mind," said Myra. "We'll wrap him properly for our anniversary next week."

"Great!" said Mr. Jensen, and for a moment he could say no more. He felt, at this critical junction in his affairs, a certain oppression in his chest, as if his ice-cold beer had frozen into a solid block when only halfway down.

"Let's open him right away," cried Myra.

"Now just a minute!" said Mr. Jensen, holding back her hand. "That's a trained snake, Myra. It's tame. It's affectionate. It does an act. You can tie it around your leg for a garter, or around your neck, or anywhere. You just stick its tail in its mouth like the two ends on a necklace. The guy said you got to love him up, you got to make a pet of him, you got to let him do his stuff right from the start. He'll be just crazy about you."

"All right," said Myra. "Now let's undo him."

"Let me get out," said Mr. Jensen. "I don't want him seeing me first. He might take to me instead of you. I'll go for a little walk, sweetie, and you can get real friendly with him."

He thereupon closed the door firmly and went for a stroll on the beach. He saw, through the Bate's picture window, the Bateses sitting with their evening Collins. For a moment he considered whether or not to pay a brief visit to these neighbors, for the purpose of mentioning casually that he had bought his wife a King snake for a present—so that afterward he might maintain that Master Eidelpfeffer had wrapped up a Coral in error. He was detained from this by noticing that the brother-in-law was present. The brother-in-law was a game warden from Ocala, and might be too curious or know too much. At this point Mr. Jensen was against intellectual curiosity on general principles, so he reverted to his original plan of representing his deadly purchase as a mere passing snake which had just dropped in, so to speak, for a bite.

As he went back toward the

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house, Mr. Jensen stopped at the incinerator and put in a little paper and some dry fragments of palm branches, for at that late moment it struck him that he had better destroy all traces of the outer green carton on which the publicity-hungry youngster had stenciled his noticeable name. He wondered if by chance he had overlooked any other detail of such importance, and the thought caused his nerves to twang like fiddle strings and a perspiration to break out upon his brow. But this small panic flitted by swiftly. He then stopped and listened, but all was deathly quiet in the house. He picked up a heavy stick, opened the door, and went in.

"Is that you, Hermie?" called his wife. "Oh, come in here, Hermie! Hermie, I don't think he likes me."

Mr. Jensen went into the bedroom, all his qualms vanished, and feeling only that the snake or his wife, or both of them, had somehow let him down. Some people are never satisfied. "Afraid to pick him up?" he said pettishly.

"I picked him up," Myra replied. "I wanted to give him a kiss. But he kept turning his head away. It's cold-blooded, that's what it is! They never get real fond of you when they're cold-blooded."

"Oh, shucks! You don't know how to handle a snake," said Mr. Jensen. "Where is he now anyway?"

"I put him to bed," said Myra. "I'll feed him an egg later, and maybe he'll act different to me."

"Maybe," said Mr. Jensen. He suddenly felt that his day had been too much for him, and he lowered himself, with a grunt, onto the connubial couch. "You and your damn menagerie!" he said crossly.

"I'll put him back in his box," said Myra.

"You said you had!" cried Mr. Jensen, hastily lifting his feet from the floor.

"Bed, dear," said Myra. "Not box. To bed, I said I put him. For his blood to get warm. Watch out! You'll squash the poor little thing!"

But Mr. Jensen had already done so, in putting back his hand to gain purchase for a quick spring from the bed. "Oh, my God!" he said. "It's got me! I'm bit"

"Better let me put some mercurochrome on it, dear," exclaimed his solicitous wife. "You never know where their teeth have been."

"They've been in me," said her husband. "That's where they've been!" He uttered these words quietly and sadly, with a detachment which represented only the calm before the storm. "I'm done for," he observed wearily.

"It don't look very deep," said Myra, taking his hand and looking at the two tiny punctures. "It's not like it was one of those poisonous snakes that bit that poor dog those people once had . . ."

At this point Mr. Jensen recovered a full sense of the urgency of the occasion.

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"It is! It's worse! It's deadly!" he cried. "I'm dying! Get a doctor, quick"

"Why, Hermie!" cried Myra, with a fond woman's emphasis on the sentimental rather than the practical side of things. "You didn't ever bring me home one of those poisonous snakes, did you? Hermie, *don't* say you did a thing like that! Not for our aniniversary – oh, Hermie, say you was joking!"

"Joking!" cried Mr. Jensen. "I'm dying, I tell you! Run!"

Myra ran, but she ran like a hen, all directions at once. It was several minutes before she returned with Mr. Bates and his brother-in-law, the knowledgeable game warden. Mr. Jensen was to be heard making some very shocking sounds as they approached the house, but, as they entered, he fell silent.

"I'm afraid he's gone, Mrs. Jensen," said Mr. Bates, speaking from a discreet position in the bedroom doorway. It was not necessary for him to venture into the bedroom itself, for he had retired only the previous year from the operation of a small but enterprising funeral parlor, and he could have recognized Mr. Jensen's unfortunate condition from six blocks away.

"Where's that snake?" said the brother-in-law, advancing into the room, stick in hand.

"Oh, Hermie!" wailed Myra. "How could you have done it to me? How could you be so bad?"

"Look out!" shouted the game warden suddenly. "Here it is! Got it!"

It takes very little to put a small snake out of action, and the next moment the two men were bending over this one. "If this is the snake," said the game warden to Myra, "your husband never died of any bite. For a moment I thought it was a Coral, but this here's a King snake, Mrs. Jensen. It's perfectly harmless."

"Of course, it's for a qualified medical practitioner to have the say-so," said Mr. Bates, "but you can take it from me, Mrs. Jensen, because I've had nearly forty years of experience, your poor husband passed away from a heart attack."

"Oh, Hermie," cried Myra, on a gush of softer tears, "I knew you was only joking!"

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The sixth in our series of detective-crime-mystery short stories by Bret Harte is supposedly based on actual incident. Just as the story relates, Mr. Harte was lying in his berth in a Pullman sleeping-car, "broad awake," on his way to his next lecture date. And while meditating on various matters, he overheard a curious conversation. It is also recorded that the original manuscript of "A Sleeping-Car Experience" was scrawled that insomniac night on "odds and ends" of scraps of paper.

This very short tale (indeed, a slightly abridged version thereof) is a fascinating piece of Americana — in its dialect, in its type of humor, in its locale and characters, and especially in its point of view. And as to when the incident took place — well, it goes back quite a long time — to more than 75 years ago. Needless to point out, Bret Harte's opinions on the comforts and conveniences of Pullman-car travel reflect the conditions which prevailed about 1875; today the service, as well as the speed, is (to quote from The One Man) undeniably A 1 — particularly, we hasten to add, on the railroads specifically mentioned by Mr. Harte.

A SLEEPING-CAR EXPERIENCE

by BRET HARTE

IT WAS IN A PULLMAN SLEEPING-CAR on a Western road. After that first plunge into unconsciousness which the weary traveler takes on getting into his berth, I awakened to the dreadful revelation that I had been asleep only two hours. The greater part of a long winter night was before me.

Finding it impossible to sleep, I lay there wondering a number of things: why, for instance, the Pullman sleeping-car blankets were unlike other blankets; why they were like squares cut out of cold buckwheat cakes, and why they clung to you when you turned over, and lay heavy on you without warmth; why the curtains before you could not have been made opaque, without being so thick and suffocating; why it would not be as well to sit up all night in an ordinary passenger car as to lie awake all night in a Pullman?

With the recollection of last night's dinner weighing on me as heavily and coldly as the blankets, I began wondering why, over the whole extent of the continent, there was no local dish; why the bill of fare at restaurant and hotel was invariably only a weak reflex of the metropolitan hostelries; why the entrées were always the same, only more or less badly cooked; why

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the traveling American always was supposed to demand turkey and cold cranberry sauce? And then I began to think of and dread the coming breakfast; to wonder why the ham was always cut half an inch thick, and why the fried egg always resembled a glass eye that visibly winked at you with diabolical dyspeptic suggestions; to wonder if the buckwheat cakes — the eating of which requires a certain degree of artistic preparation and deliberation — would be brought in as usual one minute before the train started. And then I had a vivid recollection of a fellow-passenger who, at a certain breakfast station in Illinois, frantically wrapped his portion of this national pastry in his red bandana handkerchief, took it into the smoking-car, and quietly devoured it en route.

Lying broad awake, I could not help making some observations which I think are not noticed by the day traveler. First, that the speed of a train is not equal or continuous — that at certain times the engine apparently starts up and says to the baggage train behind it, "Come, come, this won't do! Why, it's nearly half-past 2; how in hell shall we get through? Don't you talk to *me*. Pooh! pooh!" delivered in that rhythmical fashion which all meditation assumes on a railway train. *Exempli gratia:* One night, having raised my window curtain to look over a moonlit snowy landscape, as I pulled it down the lines of a popular comic song flashed across me. Fatal error! The train instantly took it up, and during the rest of the night I was haunted by this awful refrain: "Pull down the bel-lined, pull down the bel-lind; somebody's klink klink. Oh, don't be shoo-shoo!" Naturally this differs on the different railways. On the New York Central, where the roadbed is quite perfect and the steel rails continuous, I have heard this irreverent train give the words of a certain popular revival hymn after this fashion: "Hold the fort, for I am Sankey, Moody slingers still, wave the swish swosh back from klinky, klinky klanky kill." On the New York and New Haven, where there are many switches, and the engine whistles at every crossroad, I have often heard, "Tommy, make room for your whoopy! that's a little clang, bumpity bumpity boopy, clikitty, clikitty, clang." Poetry, I fear, fared little better. One starlit night, coming from Quebec, as we slipped by a virgin forest, the opening lines of 'Evangeline' flashed upon me. But this was all I could make of them: "This is the forest prim-eval-eval; the groves of the pines and the hem-locks-locks-locks-locks-loooock!" The train was only "slowing" or "braking" up at a station. Hence the jar in the meter . . .

Four o'clock — the sound of bootblacking by the porter faintly apparent from the toilet room. Why not talk to him? But, fortunately, I remembered that any attempt at extended conversation with conductor or porter was always resented by them

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as implied disloyalty to the company they represented. I recalled that once I had endeavored to impress upon a conductor the absolute folly of a midnight inspection of tickets, and had been treated by him as an escaped lunatic. No, there was no relief from this suffocating and insupportable loneliness to be gained then. I raised the window blind and looked out. We were passing a farmhouse. A light, evidently the lantern of a farm hand, was swung beside a barn. Yes, the faintest tinge of rose in the far horizon. Morning, surely, at last.

We had stopped at a station. Two men had got into the car and had taken seats in the one vacant section, yawning occasionally, and conversing in a languid, perfunctory sort of way. They sat opposite each other, occasionally looking out of the window, but always giving the stray impression that they were tired of each other's company. As I looked out of my curtains at them, the One Man said with a feebly concealed yawn:

"Yes, well, I reckon he was at one time as pop'lar an ondertaker ez I knew."

The Other Man: "But was he — this yer ondertaker — a Christian? Hed he jined the church?"

The One Man (reflectively): "Well, I don't know ez you might call him a purfessin' Christian; but he hed — yes, he hed conviction. I think Dr. Wylie hed him under conviction. Et least that was the way I got it from *him*."

A long, dreary pause.

The Other Man (feeling it was incumbent on him to say something) "But why was he pop'lar ez an ondertaker?"

The One Man (lazily): "Well, he was kinder pop'ler with widders and widderers — sorter soothen 'em in a kinder keerless way; slung 'em suthin here and there, sometimes outer the Book, sometimes outer himself, ez a man of experience az hed hed sorrer. Hed, they say (*very cautiously*), lost three wives hisself, and five children by this yer new disease — dipthery — out in Wisconsin. I don't know the facts, but that's what got round."

The Other Man: "But how did he lose his pop'larity?"

The One Man: "Well, that's the question. You see he introduced some things into ondertaking that waz new. He hed, for instance, a way, as he called it, of manniperlating the features of the deceased."

The Other Man: "Manniperlating?"

The One Man: "Look yeer, did ye ever notiss how, generally speakin', onhandsome a corpse is?"

The Other Man had noticed this fact.

The One Man: "Why, there was Mary Peebles, ez was daughter of my wife's bosom friend — a mighty pooty girl and a perfessing Christian — died of scarlet fever. Well, that gal — I was one of the mourners, being my wife's friend — well, that gal, though I hedn't, perhaps, oughter say — lying in that casket, fetched all the way from some A 1 establishment in

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Chicago, filled with flowers and furbelows — didn't really seem to be of much account. Well, although my wife's friend, and me a mourner — well, now, I was — disappointed and discouraged."

The Other Man (in palpably affected sympathy): "Sho now!"

"Yes, *sir!* Well, you see, this yer undertaker — this Wilkins — hed a way of correcting all thet. And just by manniperlation. He worked over the face of the deceased until he perduced what the survivin' relatives called a look of Resignation — you know, a sort of smile, like. When he wanted to put in any extrys, he produced what he called — hevin' reg'lar charges for this kind of work — a Christian's Hope."

The Other Man: "I want to know!"

"Yes. Well, I admit, at times it was a little startlin'. And I've allers said that I hed my doubts of its being Scriptooral or sacred, being, ez you know, worms of the yearth; and I relieved my mind to our pastor, but he didn't feel like interferin'. But the other day, when Cy Dunham died — you disremember Cy Dunham?"

A long interval of silence. The Other Man was looking out of the window and had apparently forgotten his companion completely. But as I stretched my head out of the curtain I saw four other heads as eagerly reached out from other berths to hear the conclusion of the story. One head, a female one, instantly disappeared on my looking around, but a certain tremulousness of her curtain showed unabated interest. The only two utterly disinterested men were the One Man and the Other Man.

The Other Man (detaching himself from the window): "Cy Dunham?"

"Yes, Cy never hed hed either convictions or perfessions. Uster get drunk and go round with permiscous women. Sorter like the prodigal son, only a little more so, ez fur ez I kin judge from the facks ez stated to me. Well, Cy one day petered out down at Little Rock and was sent up yeer for interment. The fammerly, being proud-like, of course didn't spare any money on that funeral, and it waz — now between you and me — about ez shapely and first-class and prime-mess an affair ez I ever saw. Wilkins hed put in his extrys. He hed put onto that prodigal's face the A 1 touch — hed him fixed up with a Christian's Hope. Well, it waz about the turning-point, for thar wuz some of the members and the pastor hisself thought that the line ort to be drawn somewhere, and thar was some talk at Deacon Tibbet's about a reg'lar conference meetin' regardin' it. But it wasn't thet which made him onpop'lar."

Another silence — and no expression from the Other Man of the least desire to know what ultimately settled the unpopularity of the undertaker. But from the curtains of the various berths I could see several eager and one or two even wrathful faces, anxious for the result.

The Other Man (lazily recurring to the lost topic): "Well, what made him onpop'lar?"

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The One Man: "The extrys, I think. When Mrs. Widdecombe lost her husband — 'bout two months ago — though she'd been through the valley of the shadder of death twice — this bein' her third marriage, hevin' been John Barker's widder" —

The Other Man: "No, you're foolin' me!"

The One Man (solemnly): "Ef I was to appear before my Maker tomorrow, yes! She was his widder."

The Other Man: "Well, I swow."

The One Man: "Well, this widder Widdecombe, she put up a big funeral for the deceased. She hed Wilkins, and thet ondertaker just laid hisself out. Just spread himself. Onfort'nately — perhaps fort'nately in the ways of Providence — one of Widdecombe's old friends, a doctor up thar in Chicago, comes down to the funeral. He goes up with the friends to look at the deceased, smilin' a peaceful sort of heavinly smile, and everybody sayin' he's gone to meet his reward, and this yer friend turns round, short and sudden, on the widder settin' in her pew, and kinder enjoyin', as wimmen will, all the compliments paid the corpse, and he says says he — 'What did you say your husband died of, marm?' 'Consumption,' she says, wiping her eyes 'Gallopin' consumption.' 'Consumption be damned,' says he, bein' a profane kind of Chicago doctor. 'Thet man died of strychnine. Look at thet face. Look at thet contortion of them facial muscles. Thet's strychnine Thet's *risers Sardonicus*' (thet's what he said; he was sorter profane). 'Why doctor,' says the widder, 'thet — thet is his last smile. It's a Christian's Resignation.' 'Thet be blowed; don't tell me,' says he. 'Hell is full of thet kind of resignation. It's pizon. And I'll' — Why, dern my skin, yes, we are; yes, it's Joliet. Wall, now, who'd hev thought we'd been nigh onto an hour."

Two or three anxious passengers from their berths: "Say, look here, stranger! What became of —"

But the One Man and the Other Man had vanished.

"O"

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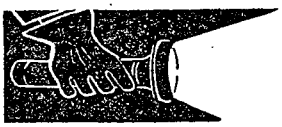

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AUTHOR:	**DOROTHY SALISBURY DAVIS**
TITLE:	***Mrs. Norris Visits the Library***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Mrs. Annie Norris
LOCALE:	New York City
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Meet two charming old ladies—"the one with the flowered hat" and the one with the beaded evening purse . . . and the first was a marvelous woman for observing . . .*

IF THERE WAS ANYTHING IN THE world Mrs. Norris liked as well as a nice cup of tea, it was to dip now and then into what she called "a comfortable novel." She found it no problem getting one when she and Mr. James Jarvis, for whom she kept house, were in the country. The ladies at the Nyack library both knew and approved her tastes, and while they always lamented that such books were not written any more, nonetheless they always managed to find a new one for her.

But the New York Public Library at Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street was a house of different entrance. How could a person like Mrs. Norris climb those wide marble steps, pass muster with the uniformed guard, and then ask for her particular kind of book?

She had not yet managed it, but sometimes she got as far as the library steps and thought about it. And if the sun were out long enough to have warmed the stone bench, she sometimes sat a few moments and observed the faces of the people going in and coming out. As her friend Mr. Tully, the detective, said of her, she was a marvelous woman for observing. "And you can take that the way you like, love."

It was a pleasant morning, this

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one, and having time to spare, Mrs. Norris contemplated the stone bench. She also noticed that one of her shoelaces had come untied; you could not find a plain cotton lace these days, even on a blind man's tray. She locked her purse between her bosom and her arm and began to stoop.

"It's mine! I saw it first!"

A bunioned pump thumped down almost on her toe, and the woman who owned it slyly turned it over on her ankle so that she might retrieve whatever it was she had found. Mrs. Norris was of the distinct opinion that there had been nothing there at all.

"I was only about to tie my shoelace," Mrs. Norris said, pulling as much height as she could out of her dumpy shape.

A wizened, rouged face turned up at her. "Aw," the creature said, "you're a lady. I'll tie the lace for you."

As the woman fumbled at her foot, Mrs. Norris took time to observe the shaggy hair beneath a hat of many summers. Then she cried, "Get up from there! I'm perfectly able to tie my own shoelace."

The woman straightened, and she was no taller than Mrs. Norris. "Did I hear in your voice that you're Irish?"

"You did not! I'm Scots-born." Then remembering Mr. Tully, her detective friend, she added, "But I'm sometimes taken for North of Ireland."

"Isn't it strange, the places people will take you to be from! Where would you say I was born? Sit down for a moment. You're not in a hurry?"

Mrs. Norris thought the woman daft, but she spoke well and softly. "I haven't the faintest notion," she said, and allowed herself to be persuaded by a grubby hand.

"I was born right down there on Thirty-seventh Street, and not nearly as many years ago as you would think. But this town—oh, the things that have happened to it!" She sat a bit too close, and folded her hands over a beaded evening purse. "A friend of mine, an actress, gave this to me." She indicated the purse, having seen Mrs. Norris glance at it. "But there isn't much giving left in this city . . ."

Of course, Mrs. Norris thought. How foolish of her not to have realized what was coming. "What a dreadful noise the buses make," she commented by way of changing the subject.

"And they're all driven by Irishmen," the woman said quite venomously. "They've ruined New York, those people!"

"I have a gentleman friend who is Irish," Mrs. Norris said sharply, and wondered why she didn't get up and out of there.

"Oh, my dear," the woman said, pulling a long face of shock. "The actress of whom I just spoke, you know? She used to be with the

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Abbey Theatre. She was the first Cathleen Ni Houlihan. Or perhaps it was the second. But she sends me two tickets for every opening night —and something to wear." The woman opened her hand on the beaded purse and stroked it lovingly. "She hasn't had a new play in such a long time."

Mrs. Norris was touched in spite of herself: it was a beautiful gesture. "Were you ever in the theater yourself?" she asked.

The old woman looked her full in the face. Tears came to her eyes. Then she said, "No." She tumbled out a whole series of no's as though to bury the matter. She's protesting too much, Mrs. Norris thought. "But I have done many things in my life," she continued in her easy made-up-as-you-go fashion. "I have a good mind for science. I can tell you the square feet of floor space in a building from counting the windows. On Broadway, that naked waterfall, you know..." Mrs. Norris nodded, remembering the display. "I have figured out how many times the same water goes over it every night. Oh-h-h, and I've written books — just lovely stories about the world when it was gracious, and people could talk to each other even if one of them wasn't one of those psychiatrists."

What an extraordinary woman!

"But who would read stories like that nowadays?" She cast a sidelong glance at Mrs. Norris.

"I would!" Mrs. Norris said.

"Bless you, my dear, I knew that the moment I looked into your face!" She cocked her head, as a bird does, at a strange sound. "Do you happen to know what time it is?"

Mrs. Norris looked at her wrist watch. The woman leaned close to look also. "A Gruen is a lovely watch," she said. She could see like a mantis.

"It's time I was going," Mrs. Norris said. "It's eleven thirty."

"Oh, and time for me, too. I've been promised a job today."

"Where?" asked Mrs. Norris, which was quite unlike her, but the word had spurted out in her surprise.

"It would degrade me to tell you," the stranger said, and her eyes fluttered.

Mrs. Norris could feel the flush in her face. She almost toppled her new, flowered hat, fanning herself. "I'm sorry," she said. "It was rude of me to ask."

"Would you like to buy me a little lunch?" the woman asked brazenly.

Mrs. Norris got to her feet. "All right," she said, having been caught fairly at a vulnerable moment. "There's a cafeteria across the street. I often go there myself for a bowl of soup. Come along."

The woman had risen with her, but her face had gone awry. Mrs. Norris supposed that at this point she was always bought off—she was not the most appetizing of sights to

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share a luncheon table with. But Mrs. Norris led the way down the steps at a good pace. She did not begrudge the meal, but she would begrudge the price of it if it were not spent on a meal.

"Wait, madam. I can't keep up with you," the woman wailed.

Mrs. Norris had to stop anyway to tie the blessed shoelace.

Her guest picked at the food, both her taste and her gab dried up in captivity. "It's a bit rich for my stomach," she complained when Mrs. Norris chided her.

Mrs. Norris sipped her tea. Then something strange happened: the cup trembled in her hand. At the same instant there was a clatter of dishes, the crash of glass, the screams of women, and the sense almost, more than the sound, of an explosion. Mrs. Norris's eyes met those of the woman's across from her. They were aglow as a child's with excitement, and she grinned like a quarter moon.

Outside, people began to run across the street toward the Library. Mrs. Norris could hear the blast of police whistles, and she stretched her neck, hoping to see better. "Eat up and we'll go," she urged.

"Oh, I couldn't eat now and with all this commotion."

"Then leave it."

Once in the street Mrs. Norris was instantly the prisoner of the crowd, running with it as if she were treading water, frighteningly, unable to turn aside or stem the tide. And lost at once was her frail companion, cast apart either by weight or wisdom. Mrs. Norris took in enough breath for a scream which she let go with a piper's force. It made room for her where there had been none before, and from then on she screamed her way to the fore of the crowd.

"Stand back! There's nobody hurt but there will be!" a policeman shouted.

Sirens wailed the approach of police reinforcements. Meanwhile, two or three patrolmen were joined by a few able-bodied passers-by to make a human cordon across the library steps.

"It blew the stone bench fifty feet in the air," Mrs. Norris heard a man say.

"The stone bench?" she cried out. "Why, I was just sitting on it!"

"Then you've got a hard bottom, lady," a policeman growled. He and a companion were trying to hold on to a young man.

Their prisoner gave a twist and came face to face with Mrs. Norris. "That's the woman," he shouted. "That's the one I'm trying to tell you about. Let go of me and ask *her!*"

A policeman looked at her. "This one with the flowers on her hat?"

"That's the one! She looked at her watch, got up and left the package, then ran down the steps, and the next thing . . ."

"Got up and left what, young man?" Mrs. Norris interrupted.

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"The box under the bench," the young man said, but to one of the officers.

"A box under the bench?" Mrs. Norris repeated.

"How come you were watching her?" the officer said.

"I wasn't especially. I was smoking a cigarette . . ."

"Do you work in the library?"

No doubt he answered, but Mrs. Norris's attention was suddenly distracted, and by what seemed like half the police force of New York City.

"I have a friend, Jasper Tully, in the District Attorney's office," she declared sternly.

"That's fine, lady," a big sergeant said. "We'll take a ride down there right now." Then he bellowed at the top of his lungs, "Keep the steps clear till the Bomb Squad gets here."

In Jasper Tully's office, Mrs. Norris tried to tell her interrogators about the strange little woman. But she knew from the start that they were going to pay very little attention to her story. Their long experience with panhandlers had run so true to pattern that they would not admit to any exception.

And yet Mrs. Norris felt sure she had encountered the exception. For example, she had been cleverly diverted by the woman when she might have seen the package. The woman had put her foot down on nothing—Mrs. Norris was sure of that. She remembered having looked down at her shoelace, and she would have seen a coin had there been one at her feet—Mrs. Norris was a woman who knew the color of money. Oh, it was a clever lass, that other one, and there was a fair amount of crazy hate in her. Mrs. Norris was unlikely to forget the venom she had been so ready to spew on the Irish.

She tried to tell them. But nobody had to button Annie Norris's lip twice. It was not long until they wished Jasper Tully a widower's luck with her, and went back themselves to the scene of the blast.

Mr. Tully offered to take her home.

"No, I think I'll walk and cogitate, thank you," she said.

"Jimmie gives you too much time off," Tully muttered. He was on close terms with her employer.

"He gives me the time I take."

"Is he in town now?"

"He is, or will be tonight. He'll be going full dress to the theater. It's an opening night."

"Aren't you going yourself?"

Mrs. Norris gave it a second's thought. "I might," she said.

The detective took a card from his pocket and wrote down a telephone number. "You can reach me through this at all hours," he said. "That's in case your cogitating gets you into any more trouble."

When he had taken her to the office door, Mrs. Norris looked up to his melancholy face. "Who was Cathleen Ni Houlihan?"

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Tully rubbed his chin. "She wasn't a saint exactly, but I think she was a living person . . . How the hell would I know? I was born in the Bronx!" A second later he added, "There was a play about her, wasn't there?"

"There was," said Mrs. Norris. "I'm glad to see you're not as ignorant as you make yourself out to be."

"Just be sure you're as smart as you think you are," Tully said, "if you're off to tackle a policeman's job again."

He had no faith in her, Mrs. Norris thought, or he wouldn't let her do it.

All afternoon she went over the morning's incidents in her mind. As soon as Mr. Jarvis left the apartment for dinner and the theater, she went downtown herself. The evening papers were full of the bombing, calling it the work of a madman. The mechanism had been made up of clock parts, and the detonating device was something as simple as a pin. It was thought possibly to have been a hatpin.

Well!

And there was not a mention of her in any account. The police were obviously ashamed of themselves.

Mrs. Norris took as her place of departure Forty-sixth Street and Seventh Avenue. Turning her back on the waterfall atop the Broadway building, she walked toward Shubert Alley. Anyone who could even guess at the number of times the same water went over the dam must have looked at it at least as often. And Cathleen Ni Houlihan—no stranger to the theater had plucked that name out of the air.

The beggars were out in droves: the blind, the lame, and the halt. And there were those with tin cups who could read the date in a dead man's eye.

Mrs. Norris was early, and a good thing she was. Sightseers were already congesting the sidewalk in front of the theater. New York might be the biggest city in the world, but to lovers of the stage a few square feet of it was world enough on an opening night.

She watched from across the street for five minutes, then ten, with the crowd swelling and her own hopes dwindling. Then down the street from Eighth Avenue, with a sort of unperturbed haste, came the little beggar-woman. She wore the same hat, the same ragged coat and carried the same beaded purse.

And she also carried a box about six inches by six which she carefully set down on the steps of a fire exit.

Mrs. Norris plunged across the street and paused again, watching the beggar, fascinated in spite of herself. Round and round one woman she walked, looking her up and down, and then she scouted another. The women themselves were well-dressed out-of-towners by their looks, who had come to gape

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at the celebrated first nighters now beginning to arrive. When the little panhandler had made her choice of victims, she said, and distinctly enough for Mrs. Norris to hear:

"That's Mrs. Vanderhoff arriving now. Lovely, isn't she? Oh, dear, that's not her husband with her. Why, that's Johnson Tree—the oil man! You're not from Texas, are you, dear?"

Mrs. Norris glanced at the arrivals. It was her own Mr. Jarvis and his friend. A Texas oil man indeed! The woman made up her stories to the fit of her victims! She was an artist at it.

Mrs. Norris edged close to the building and bent down to examine the box. She thought she could hear a rhythmic sound. She could, she realized—her own heartbeat.

"Leave that box alone!"

Mrs. Norris obeyed, but not before she had touched, had actually moved, the box. It was empty, or at least as light as a dream, and the woman had not recognized her. She was too busy spinning a tale. Mrs. Norris waited it out. The woman finally asked for money and got it. She actually got paper money! Then she came for the box.

"Remember me?" Mrs. Norris said.

The woman cocked her head and looked at her. "Should I?"

"This morning on the Public Library steps," Mrs. Norris prompted.

The wizened face brightened. "But of course! Oh, and there's something I wanted to talk to you about. I saw you speaking to my young gentleman friend—you know, in all that excitement?"

"Oh, yes," Mrs. Norris said, remembering the young man who had pointed her out to the police.

"Isn't he a lovely young man? And to have had such misfortune."

"Lovely," Mrs. Norris agreed.

"You know, he had a scholarship to study atomic science and *those* people did him out of it."

"*Those* people?"

"All day long you can see them going in and out, in and out, carting books by the armful. Some of them have beards. False, you know. And those thick glasses—I ask you, who would be fooled by them? Spies! Traitors! And *they* can get as many books as they want."

"Oh, *those* people," Mrs. Norris said understandingly.

"And my poor young friend. They won't even give him a library card, and after I wrote him such a nice reference."

"Do you know where he lives?" Mrs. Norris said as casually as she could.

"No. But I know where he works. He fixes watches for a jeweler on Forty-seventh Street. I walked by there once and saw him working in the window. If you wait here for me, I'll walk over and show you the place tonight. He's not there now, of course, but I'm sure he'll be there in the morning. I hope you can help him."

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Considering what he had tried to do for her, Mrs. Norris hoped she could, too. "I'll try," she said.

The warning buzzer sounded within the theater. The lights flickered.

"Excuse me a moment," the woman said and picked up the box. "I've bought some flowers for an actress friend of mine, and I want to give them in before curtain. Wouldn't it be nice if she invited us to see the play? I shan't accept, of course, unless she invites both of us."

Mrs. Norris doubted that she would see the woman again once she got out of sight. She had what might be called a temporary sort of mind. "Tell me before you go," Mrs. Norris asked, "what did you think was in the package under the library bench?"

"What package, dear?" The woman rolled her eyes slyly upward.

"The one you thought I was going to find today when you stomped your foot down on a round nothing."

The old lady clutched at her sleeve with a grubby fist. "That was mine! What do you mean, *you* found it?"

"Then you can tell me what was in it?"

The woman withdrew her hand. Blandly she said, "No, I'll just tell the police if you don't give it back to me."

"I'll tell them myself," Mrs. Norris thought. She said, "You'll be late with your flowers. Hand them in and we'll take a nice walk, you and I, and settle everything."

"I'll be right along," the woman said, and moistened her lips in greedy anticipation.

FAIR WARNING...

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Remember Ruth Chessman's "Murder—Early American" in our December 1958 issue? Well, here is another story of crime and detection set in the American Colonies before the Revolutionary War—another fascinating and authentic pilgrimage to early American times when, as always, murder reared its ugly head, but when, as was the custom of the period, the investigation of homicide was left chiefly to local amateurs. (There was no professional detective, in the true sense, until early in the nineteenth century.)

We think you will find "The Harrington Farthing" a rewarding tale—of an uncommon thief, circa 1700, who is saved from the gallows by one of the most curious types of reprieve ever invented by the conniving mind of man, and of his adventures thereafter in the environs of a place "called by the strange name of Philadelphia" . . . altogether, a sort of "Monte Cristo" episode of the American Colonies.

THE HARRINGTON FARTHING

by RUTH CHESSMAN

WALTER PAIGE WAS A THIEF. IN this modern England of 1700 a man had to have his trade, else how could he live? Walter was an expert in his line, and it is no exaggeration to say that his skill as a thief was a matter of life and death, for the laws were strict and mercy was rare. Still, he might have lived out his years in peace, prosperous from robberies conceived by his daring mind, but for a mischievous turn of character that did not vanish with his boyhood.

In January of the year he was twenty-three he paused on an impulse to kiss the lovely lips of an alluring victim, and the kiss being acknowledged—and unexpectedly returned—the pause lengthened. It was truly the worst kind of luck that the husband returned in time to defend his possessions.

Walter was found guilty of the theft of her ladyship's jewels and, discreetly, of nothing more. But this was enough—indeed, more than enough—to bring him to the edge of the gallows. On his final night he was held in a bleak cell with one other condemned man, each to share in the dubious glory, for it was to be a double hanging.

"A pretty boy you are, too," his companion, an old man, commented, not unkindly. "The ladies will call it a pity you die."

"I needn't go to the ladies for that," Walter retorted. "I call it a pity myself."

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"Do you indeed?" the old man queried in sincere surprise. "You really wish to go on living? To be hungry save when you steal for your food? To have no bed you can call your own? To turn from the filth of all you call home to—something worse? No, even had I your youth and that yellow hair of yours, even that flashing smile and that great height, still I would choose this end rather than a going on with life as I have always known it. Young man, I welcome the drop that comes at dawn! I can hardly wait for an end to all I suffer."

"Oh, my poor old friend!" Walter exclaimed compassionately, and talked of it no more. Well he knew the picture this old man, Coogins by name, drew of the poor. It was only by a mixture of good luck and good blood that he had improved on his own lot, for he had a better heritage than most. His mother had been a dancer before her fall, and a nobleman—though which one she could not say—had been his father. In him was mingled the best blood of the kingdom with the wiliest grace imaginable, for his mother had been first not only in England but in the world. Knowing of his heritage had given him an audacity to augment his skill, and he had thought never to run afoul of the law. And in truth, it was only a moment's amorousness that had brought him to this pass.

He took off his handsome jacket, stolen only three months earlier from the only gentleman in England who was broad enough in the shoulders, and now he rolled it into a pillow for the old man. He sat on the stone floor beside him, for there was not even straw to soften their waiting. Neither of them spoke, for with the dark hours rising fast into their final sunrise, what would there be to say save good-bye?

At dawn the door to their cell rattled, and Walter sprang to his feet. He thought it was the gaolers, come to guide them on their last walk, and he had determined to go down fighting. But when the door opened it admitted another sort of man entirely, dressed like a gentleman without being one, a smooth-talking sort with a paper in one hand and hope—yes, hope!—on his lips. When he stated his case, Walter turned jubilantly to his cellmate.

"We are free, Coogins!" he cried. "We need only sign for transportation, and we are out into the free air again."

Coogins struggled to his feet. "Do not sign it!" he cried. "They are cheating you. Instead of dying all at once this very dawn, they will drag out your dying for fourteen years. I have heard much of those American masters."

Walter had a moment's pause at that, for he did not relish the thought of slavery, and the word "master" did not set well with his independent spirit. Yet even though

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it meant being sold into bondage for fourteen years, a time that might well be longer than what life was left to him, still it was being alive, and with life there was always hope. With no more hesitation than this he made his mark enthusiastically, and turned once more to Coogins.

"I am not a man to think my way is the only right one," he said gently, "and so if you persist you must die, by your own hand as it were, and God save you. But think on it once more. Life may be kinder to you henceforth."

Without response Coogins handed Walter back his silken jacket and took a coin from somewhere among his rags.

"Here," he said. "I meant to die with it on me. It was a whim, that I must not die a pauper. But you have been kind to me, and there are evil days before you. Who knows, my old farthing piece may stand you a moment's good."

Walter took the farthing, which was indeed old and tarnished. It had come for a miser's hoard that Coogins had stolen, although that was not the theft which had brought the old man to the gallows.

"You come as close to a father as I have ever known," Walter said. "Until this moment, Coogins, no man ever held his hand out to me in friendship. I feel it will soften all the rest of my life."

"Then I name you all the son I shall ever know," said Coogins.

With no more parting than this they shook hands in final farewell.

Walter had hoped to break free once he was away from the prison, but he soon found himself heavily manacled, and even the sweet smell of freedom was his for only two hours. After that he was flung into the hold of a ship, already stinking with the smells of some two hundred wretches who were to be his companions. There were thirty transportees, and these were to sail bound hand and foot. All thirty had taken the hope of bondage in exchange for the hemp. The rest were a mixture of children, boys and girls up to fifteen, who had been kidnapped for the traffic, and young men and women who had sold themselves to the Captain for their passage. These last had a right to somewhat better hopes than the transported felons—their terms of servitude were never to be more than seven years, except for the children, who must serve until age twenty-one. Often the men and women need serve only three years, depending on how they had agreed with the Captain.

They set sail with the tide during the next night, and when they were out of sight of land the transportees were turned loose. Many times during the eleven weeks that followed Walter was to wonder if he had been wise in leaving Coogins and the quick end they could have shared. Such slop as they were given for food! Such tainted

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air as they must breathe, for none were allowed on deck! Such crowding as they must endure! And then finally the fever, the sickness which swept through the hold and carried off all but two of the children, and enough others to cut their whole number almost in half.

"At least now we have breathing space," one felon said cynically.

"I would not have purchased it at such cost," Walter declared passionately. He had become fond of the youngsters, such frightened mites so needy for kindness, and once he was back on his feet himself, no matter how shaky, he had nursed those children he could, even past the time when it was clear no nursing could help. Nor did he change towards them even when he found his farthing on the body of a shrunken boy he prepared for a sea burial. As he slipped the coin back into the pocket of his jacket he thought only, it would not have been in me, at this poor boy's age, to rob my benefactor—but how do I know, he added, for at his age I had no benefactor.

The deaths of the children, which he put down to the Captain's callous negligence, did not make the sound of "master" sweeter to his ears. As the voyage neared its end he began to wonder what was the best he could hope for.

"I hear escape is easy," one brute said. "But dangerous, for it is an escape from the master to the devilish Indians who lie in wait for scalps. And," he continued with a natural feeling of superiority over the half-savage Colonial, "it is only in reason that they would prize nothing higher than an English scalp."

From this another concluded that a city master would be best, far better than a farmer. "With a city master we can escape to the wharves, and ship on a vessel homeward bound, and so work passage back to England."

The word "work" fell on Walter's ears with a disheartening sound, for it was a pastime of all things foreign to him; but since he must choose between the loss of his bright hair to the wild Indians on the one hand, and the lot of labor on the other, he said simply, "In that case, I choose me a city master."

"Oh, aye, easily said," one rascal pointed out. "It is but a question of how you mean to come by your city man."

"I cannot rightly say at the moment," Walter admitted thoughtfully, "but I do not doubt that somehow I can bring it about."

The night before the ship docked, seven of the transportees fell upon Walter—it would take seven, he thought proudly, even as he struggled. Their purpose was to rob him. All they found, for it was all he had, was poor Coogins farthing.

"Fah!" said one. "Naught but an old Harrington farthing."

The others crowded about to see

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the coin. "I never saw a Harrington–I know only the rose farthing. I heard there was one which bore a harp and crowned harp," they said, fingering the blackened coin, and forgetting Walter who softly, in cat motions, rose to his feet and in an instant had two of them by the throat. "I'll have the hearts of all of you lest I get my farthing," he declared, and the coin was hastily returned.

"I should have known no man is safe with such cutthroats!" he said. "But the more fool I, I trusted you."

"Oh, aye, and well you might," cried one. "You and your airs, and we wondering what man in this hold could feel the right to be so proud and sure, and so we laid it to a secret store of money. But now we see you carry yourself so by nature, and need no gold to build you higher."

The ship docked in mid-morning of a chill April day at a place called by the strange name of Philadelphia. Here there was such a bustle as could be heard to the very hold itself.

"It must be a large city indeed," Walter concluded, with as much satisfaction as he was to feel for some time.

He had thought they would be put on the block and auctioned off, as he heard was done; but the matter, by this Captain at least, was handled differently. Men came on board and purchased the bondsmen in large groups, as if to stock a servant-shop. Thus one little man picked the finest looking, a lot of ten men and women, and paid over a sum to the Captain. Walter was in this lot, and two other men; the rest were comely young women.

"You've skimmed the cream off, Beaton," the Captain grumbled even as he took the silver. "The rest are worthless."

"That's your lookout," Beaton said gleefully. "You're well paid, and rid of ten at once. Pity me now, for I must peddle them from door to door."

"Ah, poor Beaton!" the Captain said. "My heart is wrung for you! Well I know the prices you'll get–and that I would get myself had I but the time for such things."

Beaton was such a small man that Walter was sure now there would be no problem in escaping even before they were sold to any master, for with ten of them he must be easily overpowered. But this hope too must die. They were tied to one another with ropes, and led by Beaton and two sailors to a cart waiting on the dock. Here they were tied to the cart itself, so tight that one of the sailors protested, "It will take a knife to cut them free, sir. You are a-wasting of good rope, sir."

"Protecting my investment," Beaton replied cheerfully, and proceeded to drive so rapidly from the docks that Walter roared, "What's your hurry, man? We are having

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the very life shaken from us!"

Beaton grinned at Walter over his shoulder. "There's money to be saved, young sir," he replied with mock respect. "The sooner I sell all you noble ladies and gentlemen, the less likely I am to have to pay for your keep."

He stopped soon before a red brick house, tied his horse carefully to the hitching post, said mockingly, "Don't go off, now," and vanished inside. Shortly he returned with a lady of grim mien. She selected three of the women, remarking, "They look strong enough. But are they willing to work?"

"You can see I have none but the best," Beaton told her. "Only wanting to make their fortunes, and all from good families in the old country."

The girls were cut free, and went after their mistress into the house. The woman looked like a Tartar, and Walter did pity two of the girls from his heart. The third, though, had a tongue on her and was going to give the mistress more than she had bargained for.

In this manner the women were all disposed of, for all Philadelphia seemed pleading for serving-women. One of the men, he who could read and write, was snatched up by a merchant as a clerk. Now there remained only Walter and one other, a dark, ill-favored man whose great virtue was meekness.

"Now for you, my great fellow," Beaton said to Walter, and drove the cart to a grand place called Parke's Hotel. Here they were a long time waiting, for the man Beaton had come to see had gone off on a matter of business, and only returned after the sun had begun to set.

"Mr. Kenny, sir," Beaton called almost before the man's carriage had come to a stop. "I have the man you spoke for, a fine strong young fellow who'll turn your land with one hand."

"A farmer!" Walter breathed. "I'll have to scotch this."

"Oh, aye, and how you mean to, is what I wonder," muttered his companion.

Until that moment Walter could not have said, but catching sight of a pretty young woman leaving the carriage and going straight into the Hotel, and seeing in Mr. Kenny a man of stout middle age, he waited calmly until his prospective master came closer, whereupon he said boldly, "It is all very well for you to be satisfied with me, sir, but I have my wants as well. Plague me if I serve any master and there be no pretty young woman about. I am a man no woman would look at twice, to be sure," he added, drawing himself up as straight as his bonds would let him, his fine blue eyes belying his words by their sparkle, "but I cannot work if there are no pretty women about for me to admire—respectfully, of course! I vow I cannot work else!"

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"Hold your rogue's tongue!" Beaton almost screamed in his rage. "Pretty women indeed! A pretty lash is what he needs, Mr. Kenny, sir. The lash, and hard work."

Mr. Kenny looked at Walter coldly. "I am afraid this man will not do at all," he said, and looked past him at his ugly companion. "I fancy that one."

Beaton was a little mollified by the sale of at least one, but when he was alone with Walter he was still angry enough to promise him, "I'll find you a cruel master now, you royal highness, never you fear."

"Do that, and I'll break you in half as soon as you cut me loose," Walter promised him genially.

Beaton snorted. For all his small size he was not a timid man, and he had arms and hands of iron. He was not so skilled in tying knots as a sailorman, but he was able to pull a tight rope nevertheless. His anger began to mount higher as the sun dipped lower.

"Now I must pay for a bed for you, you lumbering fool!" he snarled. "Never think but that I'd let you sleep in the cart, only for fear you'd sicken and be a total loss to me instead."

"Oh, then, your worries are over," Walter told him. "I am willing to do you a kindness and sleep in this very hotel. Yes, I like the Parke Hotel. You may bed me down here, and inconvenience yourself no further. Indeed, to make it simpler still, you may sleep in the cart, since I care not a farthing if you sicken, even unto death."

Beaton whipped up his horse without another word and they rattled out of the city in all haste against full sunset. Even so it was dark when they drew up before a small inn.

"Here at least it will be cheap," Beaton told him, as he began to work on Walter's ropes. "I have heard of the place. The innkeeper is a simpleton who charges too little, but I do not wish to quarrel with him for that."

Before he untied a single knot Beaton took fresh rope and secured Walter's feet at the ankles so that he could take only short steps—he was hobbled, like a horse! His hands were still firmly tied, so Beaton could now safely cut him loose from the cart. Leading him with a bit of rope as if he were a tame animal, Beaton went inside.

The room was empty save for a young woman who greeted them pleasantly, with a look of inquiry at Walter. A fine spectacle he must make indeed, shackled hand and foot and led by a man half his size! He was in a sudden rage, and the young woman being of the dark sprightly sort he had always favored made his indignity all the greater.

To be sure we have room for you," she said. "My husband will be back shortly, if you need help with your—prisoner."

"No prisoner I!" Walter dis-

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claimed. "Your obedient servant, Ma'am!"

Beaton laughed loudly. "A fine joke that, your higness. Her obedient servant." He looked thoughtfully at the young woman, who seemed quite willing to be amused, then said seriously, "Tell your good husband, Ma'am, that I have here a man, his services for sale for a term of fourteen years, and I will let him go cheap since the place and —and all about here seem to please my aristocratic transportee."

"You may tell him yourself, sir. He has only stepped out to the barn to see to a fretful cow."

"No—no—" Beaton said quickly. "I shall take my servantman above stairs, and when your husband returns, you may tell him of the great bargain you have found for him."

"I am hungry," Walter announced. "See that I am fed, Beaton, or you'll have no slave to sell by morning."

Grudgingly Beaton ordered bread and milk for both, but had the young woman, who told them she was called Hitty Curtis, carry the meal to their room. When she left them Beaton said, "I must keep you alive till you are sold, that I must. But there'll be no more of this pretty woman talk if I am to gag you to put an end to it."

"You need have no fear," Walter assured him as he ate. "I would prize this place. It is well situated, with all its other merits, so close to the docks that I believe a strong man on foot could make it in half a day."

"Oh, aye," said Beaton sagely. "I see your hopes, and it is no matter to me what you do once you are out of my hands. But still it will be better if Innkeeper Curtis buys you sight unseen, for that is a handsome young wife he has. He might be a simpler oaf than I've heard, and still have sense enough to worry at having you too near her. I believe we may safely leave it to milady herself to sell you to her husband, for it did seem to me her eyes brightened famously at the sight of you. I think we may sleep the night secure that we will awaken to a new master for you."

Both men were so well satisfied with the prospect that after Walter had been securely bound to the bedposts, hand and foot, they fell asleep side by side. But the discomfort of his rigid position awakened Walter after only a nap, and he lay listening to Beaton's snoring. After a little, idly, he began to fumble at his hand bonds, with no other idea than to loosen them for more comfort in sleeping. Beaton's cords were tied in no sailor's knots and he found, to his pleasure, that it was simple for him to untie them. Once free of the bedpost, he worked at his shackled wrists with his teeth, and soon they too surrendered. After that it was only a matter of course to free himself entirely. He got off the bed slowly, but with little danger of awakening Beaton,

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for who sleeps so well as he who knows his bedmate is tied hand and foot to the bed?

Walter thought briefly of robbing his owner, but it was too risky a business. Instead he left the room, shutting the door softly behind him, and went to the steps to survey the large room below.

Hitty was gone now, and the fire had burned low. A large, unpleasant-looking man went about clumsily, snuffing the candles. Walter drew back and in so doing made a little sound that in the night stillness was enough to cause the man to look up. There was no help for it now—Walter came down the short flight of stairs readily, prepared to overpower the fellow if need be, and hoping for no more than it be done with no outcry.

"Ah, you must be that Beaton my wife's told me of," Curtis said, staring. "She did not speak of your being so large."

"I do not wonder at it," Walter said promptly. "My size terrifies the ladies."

"So you have a man for sale, she says," Curtis went on with transparent carelessness.

"Oh, aye," Walter said, matching his carelessness. "Your wife—is she about?"

"No, the infant awakened, and that is all Hitty cares about, the babe. Always the babe."

And no wonder, you stupid brute, Walter thought; but he was grateful for the womanly behavior of Hitty Curtis, whose presence would only have betrayed the truth to her husband.

Walter then proceeded with great politeness to sell Beaton to the innkeeper. There must be as little haggling as possible, for although Walter wanted the whole business made short and would have given Beaton up for the asking, still he must seem the normal servant-seller, and had seen enough of the negotiations to know that a first offer was never accepted. The time seemed endless before they reached the sum of five pounds English, with Curtis still hesitating, when Walter suddenly remembered Coogins' farthing. With a mental bow of gratitude to the man who had foreseen this evil day, he tossed the coin to Curtis and said, "There, now, you may say you bought fourteen year's of a man's life for less than five pounds."

It turned the trick. Curtis paid over five English coins which he took from the till.

"Now the man—and his papers," Curtis said.

"It will not do to awaken him now," Walter said. "He needs his rest to do his best work."

"He'll work for me, never fear," Curtis said savagely. "They all work for me."

His wife, too, I'll take my vow, Walter thought, and was not pleased at the idea.

"I'll take his papers now," Curtis said.

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"Oh, aye, if you will," said Walter. "I'll go up and get them."

By opening the shutters of the upstairs hall window Walter clambered in safety to the ground. He tried to think as Beaton would, and decided the slayer would expect him to take off at once for Philadelphia. Accordingly he made his way to the barn. Here he felt his way past horse flanks and cow udders to the loft ladder, and climbed up. Under a fine hill of hay he fell into his first refreshing sleep since leaving London.

He wakened to the sounds of voices, and the sight of torch-bearing men in the barnyard. It was still dark, and he could not question but they were after him. He was being sought too soon after his escape to hope they would believe he was on his way to Philadelphia—indeed, within a few breaths' time, they came to the foot of the ladder and called out, "We know you are there, Walter Paige. Come down or we fire the barn."

It seemed a drastic step to take to recover a mere servant, but this was a strange country—who knew how the Americans valued their bondsmen? Walter submitted, and was collared by two strangers. Walking between them he was forced back to the inn.

He was not surprised to see Beaton pacing about angrily.

"Ah, you've caught the rogue!" he exclaimed.

"Rogue, am I?" Walter protested boldly. "Made a sale for you, I did, for all the thanks I get. Sold myself to Curtis for five English pounds."

He flung the money down on the table, but before Beaton's greedy hands could reach it, one of the two men covered the coins with a great hand.

"This must wait," he said sharply. "Hitty—Hitty, girl—" he called, and the young woman, holding her child in a shawl, came from an inner room. She was pale with more than sleeplessness, Walter thought. She was a fine-looking girl, though, his kind entirely, and even in this moment of surrender he begrudged Curtis his wife. Curtis—? He wondered at the landlord's absence, and at the way the two strangers would not give Beaton his five pounds. He soon learned the why of it, for as Hitty stood there, his eyes on her caught a glimpse of something on the floor and he whirled back for a good look. "Dead—why, the man's dead! What's happened to Curtis?"

"Strangled—and may he rot," one said contemptuously. "A mean life he led our sister Hitty. When she called us this night and said he was murdered—but still we must take you in to be charged for the killing."

"So!" cried Beaton. "You cheat the gallows in the old country only to hang here. I knew you for a rogue the first I clapped eyes on you!"

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"These transportees are all of a cloth," Hitty's first brother said. "Murderers all. And not only that —robbery! Now tell us, Hitty, what money had you?"

"Six pounds English, Jason," she said quietly. Walter thought she would not long scold the fate that had made her a widow, from the looks of her. "Six pounds English, I have said, and a Spanish dollar, and some coins of the Bay Colony —all I do not remember but sure I am of three pine-tree shillings. I counted the money in the till before I left to see to the babe."

"Then he'll have the rest on him!" The brothers searched Walter who submitted unprotestingly, saying, "But I did not kill him, Ma'am, nor yet rob him in the ordinary sense. I played a trick on him, yes, I grant that. But no more."

"The five pounds is his all," Jason muttered. "What say you to that, Peter?"

"I say that he has lost the rest. I say that he has robbed and killed our dear brother-in-law, and that instead of thanking him properly we must give him in charge."

Beaton broke in eagerly, "Then why do it? None know the truth but us, and *we* will not tell it."

"None know the truth but the murderer and I," Walter said, "and since he will not tell it, I must."

"Look you!" Peter cried, half in admiration. "Again he denies his guilt!"

"For I am not guilty," said Walter. "But I know who is, and I will teach you how you may be as wise as I."

"Hark to the learned man," Beaton said contemptuously. "Know you, he is but gallows bait."

Walter might not have heard him. "Curtis and I haggled over the price," he said coolly. "Since I wished the bargain to seem real, we haggled, and when mine host still hesitated at five English pounds I tossed him the only coin I had, a farthing black with time. This turned the trick."

"Yes," said Hitty, nodding. "It is like my poor husband."

"Which farthing is not in your till now, I believe?" Walter asked, and Peter retorted, "Did you not hear, man? The till's empty!"

"Oh, aye, and murderer is richer by all that was in the till, and my farthing with it. Thus all you need do is seek out the man who holds my farthing, and you have the murderer."

Hitty groaned her disappointment aloud. "One farthing is like its brother!"

"But not this one—not this black old coin that crossed from England in my pocket. This was no common rose farthing, but an old Harrington farthing with the crowned harp. You do not get many such on this side of the water!"

Beaton started to move towards the door and Walter cried, "Lay hold of him. Search him."

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Hitty's brothers were too quick and too big for Beaton, and emptied his pockets of all the money he had collected during the day's trading, of all he may have had to begin with, of all—and one discolored old Harrington farthing.

"Trying to enslave me, he was," Beaton muttered. "Saying he'd bought and paid for me, and no money to show for it in my pocket. Trying to rob me, he was, and when I resisted, he resisted, and then—"

"—then with your strong fingers you tried to choke the truth out of him," Walter said, "only it was his life he gave up."

The two brothers talked it over, and decided there was enough of a moon for them to ride to Philadelphia with Beaton in what was left of the night. "I will have a good plea for my life, never you fear," Beaton said, making no objection to going with them. But as they came to the door, he screeched, "My money—my five pounds."

"No, you don't!" Peter cried. "This money is our sister's, a poor widow with a child to raise. Leave the money, and instead take back your man."

"No, wait!" Hitty commanded, and looked at Walter as she spoke. "I will need a strong man here if I am to go on with the inn. Let the man stay."

The brothers looked at one another, at their sister, then last at Walter, seeming to see him for the first time.

"He's a crafty one, I'll wager," Peter observed.

"Lived by his wits, I doubt not," Jason agreed.

"Never lifted a finger to a job of work," they told Hitty, who answered, "He will work for me." She crossed the room, picked up the five pounds, and dropped them one by one into Beaton's outspread hand.

Beaton pocketed the money before he spoke. "Watch him close, Mistress Curtis," he said spitefully. "He is most pleased the docks are so near."

"You will not run away, will you, man?" Hitty asked, and smiled suddenly at him. "You will serve me faithfully, will you not?"

"Oh, aye, I will serve you well," he promised, and in his eyes there was a message that spoke of more than bonded servitude.

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THE OUTER DARKNESS

by HELEN McCLOY

(continued from page 42)

WHEN John woke, the sun was shining. It was only seven and he would have liked to sleep longer, but he couldn't. Wearily he rose.

Yet the beauty of this summer day was unearthly. Sunlight shone through the leaves outside the windows, turning them from bottle-green to jade. Through an open window came the dancing delight of bird song, sunshine made audible. An open window. One of the French windows. He did not remember that it had been left open last night.

Hand on the newel post, he paused. A flash of apricot silk held his eyes. Marcia sat in the chair before the desk. Head and shoulders were bent forward, lying on the open drop leaf. Her black hair trailed across the cream-colored blotter. She was motionless. Something at her breast glittered like an ornament.

John's face was haggard as he walked down the long room to the desk. The glittering thing at her breast was the round metal base of the stick-file. Its long steel point had been driven into her chest, slightly to the left. He stood looking at her, not daring to touch her.

"Am I interrupting?"

He started uncontrollably at the sound of the clear, light voice. Christine was standing at the open window, her fair head bare and bright in the sunshine. Her white-gloved hands held a large book bound in paper.

"I came really to avoid Marcia. I wanted to return this report that I borrowed from Paul and—" Her voice died. Her eyes opened wide and her lips parted, unsmiling. "What—when?"

John recovered his voice. "Please come in quietly."

"The stick-file!" Her whisper was charged with horror. "Have you called the police?"

"No. I just came downstairs. No one else knows yet."

"The radio in the swimming pool would have looked like an accident," said Christine. "But this can't be accident. Sitting in a chair like that, she couldn't have fallen on the stick-file. Someone must have picked it up and stabbed her. If she had fallen to the floor, she might have stumbled with the stick-file in her hand and fallen on the point by accident—if she had been drinking." Christine's glance took in the decanter of brandy. She put out a gloved hand toward Marcia.

"You musn't touch her!" said John quickly.

Christine looked at him with a woman's contempt for the mascu-

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line hypocrisies of the law. "Why not?"

Marcia's hand was limp and yielding to Christine's touch. "Fingerprints." She looked at the base of the stick-file. "They must be blurred. Not wiped clean. No fingerprints at all would be as bad as—Paul's."

It was the first time she had put the horrible possibility into words. John shuddered. "Are you out of your mind? You can't tamper with evidence in a homicide case. And you don't actually know whose fingerprints are there."

"Don't I?" Her mouth twisted sardonically. "Don't you? Who moved the chair that sent the radio plunging into the pool yesterday?"

John sighed. "Criminal investigation is a science today. You can't do anything without leaving traces that reveal themselves to the microscope."

"I'll take a chance on that." Her voice was grim. "You see, I love Paul. And there isn't time to argue. He may be down at any moment. He wouldn't let anyone take risks for him." She was brushing the base of the stick-file with her gloved fingertips.

"This is madness!" John took a step toward her. But his age betrayed him. He was too slow. Already Christine's hands were under Marcia's armpits, and she was easing the body to the floor. Now Marcia was lying prone, one cheek pressed against the rung, the base of the stick-file hidden between her breast and the floor.

"Why did she fall?" muttered Christine. "She had been drinking, she was drowsy, and—I have it! High heels!" She snatched an apricot mule from one of the dead feet.

"Stop!" John grasped the heel of the slipper. "I am going to tell the police everything you did."

"I doubt that." They looked into each other's eyes. Suddenly Christine wrenched the slipper. John held on to the heel. A crack showed between heel and sole, revealing loose nails. With a sigh John let go.

"Perfect!" Christine laid the slipper on the floor near the unshod foot. "She was hurrying. Her heel caught on the rug and came loose. She stumbled and fell on the stick-file she was carrying. She was going to put some papers on it." Christine turned to the desk. "These will do. Bills." She let them fall beside Marcia's outstretched hand. "Was that window open when you came down?"

"I—I don't remember."

"We'll leave it open. If the police don't accept this accident story, things must look as if an intruder could have got in some time last night. And out again. Time!" Christine was looking at the bracelet watch on Marcia's wrist. The thick, modern crystal had been knocked off. The delicate, metal hands had stopped at eleven twenty.

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Christine was on her knees. There was a snap. The hands lay on the floor beside the watch. Its round face was blank and innocent now. "The less the police learn about these details the better." She looked up at John. "You're not going to tell, are you?"

He looked down at her sadly. "I doubt if I'll have to. They'll probably find out."

"How can they? I'm wearing gloves!"

"They may not identify you," said John. "But they are sure to know that the body was moved after death. Blood settles on the lowest side of a corpse because gravity takes over when circulation stops. This still blood forms a dark stain called post-mortem lividity. If it's on the wrong side, it means the body has been moved several hours after death."

"I wonder when she died." Christine dropped her voice. "Did you hear anything during the night?"

John shook his head.

"There was no blood from the wound when I moved her. Does that mean she has been dead a long time?"

"Not necessarily. In a deep puncture, a round, pointed blade like this will staunch the blood at the same time it makes the wound."

Christine looked unhappy. "I feel like a murderer."

"Yes." John was grim. "So do I." He stumbled toward the nearest chair and sank into it. "If it's possible, I'll do what I can to keep you out of this."

"Out of what?"

At the sound of Paul's voice from the stairs John felt he had reached the end of his frail endurance.

"What's wrong?" Paul looked from John to Christine.

"Paul," whispered Christine. "It's Marcia. She's dead."

With a face like granite, Paul came down into the living-room. "You found her like this?"

"Why—" the question disconcerted Christine.

John looked up quickly. "I found her, Paul. Like that. Christine came to return a report a moment later."

"She seems to have stumbled," said Christine, "and fallen on the point of the stick-file. It's imbedded in her breast."

"How do you know?" Paul's question was sharp. "You can't see her breast now."

"We—I looked—" stammered Christine. "I mean, I lifted her a little to see if she were really dead or just fainted."

"You should have been able to tell she was dead."

"We couldn't be sure until we had moved her," insisted John stoutly. "In these cases of accidental death—"

"This is not accident," interrupted Paul. "It's murder!"

Christine caught her breath. "Why do you say that?"

"Because of what happened yes-

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terday. The window screen Marcia liked to lean against was left unfastened. It happened to be Uncle John who leaned against it first and I was able to save him. But that was chance. The mathematical probability was that Marcia would lean against it before anyone else and fall to her death. You know what happened at the swimming pool. That radio was too near the water. Its cord shouldn't have been lying under a chair so that anyone who moved the chair would send the radio tumbling into the water. Someone deliberately arranged the thing to happen that way. It was chance that I sprang the trap unwittingly at the wrong moment—just as Marcia left the water."

John looked at Paul with something near despair. "The police might be misled by the fact that you were close at hand each time. You were near enough to the window to hold me back, and at the swimming pool it was you who sprang the trap, however unsuccessfully."

Paul seemed taken aback. "Are you suggesting seriously that the police would suspect me?"

John answered steadily, "Any husband is always suspect in his wife's death."

"I can't help that," said Paul doggedly. "I must tell them everything I know, in simple justice to Marcia."

Christine looked at John blankly.

He rose. "I'm tired. I'm going up to my room to lie down. But, Paul, I ask you to remember one thing: several people, who mean more to you than Marcia, had reason to hate her. Do you want to involve them? Let the police do their own work."

"I must call them. Now." Paul crossed the room to the telephone. As he lifted the handset, the doorbell rang.

Paul put down the telephone and went to the door. Two men were standing on the doorstep in the sunshine, Kopeck and a stranger. Kopeck smiled. "Paul, Colonel Ripon wants another word with you before he goes to Washington. May we come in?"

Paul stood still, barring their way. "I was just about to call the police. Marcia is dead. In rather extraordinary circumstances."

John and Christine exchanged a look of relief. When it came to the point, Paul had not used the word "murder." Christine let her breath go in a long sigh. It was John who stumbled and crumpled to the floor. He had fainted.

John sighed and stretched his legs between cool sheets that felt like soft old linen.

He lay still, not letting himself think about Marcia and all that had happened. Finally there was a tap on the door. Christine came in with Paul. Under strain, her slenderness began to look brittle. Paul's

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eyes brooded sullenly under the heavy brows.

"Feeling better, Uncle John?" he said heavily.

"Much better." John looked at Christine. "This is your home?"

"Mine and my mother's"

"It's very kind to take me in," said John. "But why?"

"The police have taken over Paul's house. I thought you would be better off here for a day or so. Luckily, Colonel Ripon agreed. He wants to see you. Are you able to talk to him now?"

"Oh, yes," John's voice was firm. "I'm quite ready."

"I'll tell him." Christine left them.

Paul sat at the end of the bed. "Ripon has taken charge of the investigation, semi-officially. The local police are only too glad of his help. In these days anything that involves people working in the research laboratory at Duross Electric is under the jurisdiction of Military Intelligence."

Another tap on the door. Paul rose to admit Christine and Colonel Ripon, and John had his first good look at the man. Tall, lean, with smooth, dark hair and a neat mustache. Everything about his dress and bearing had a drilled precision, an immaculate finish.

"I know all about you, Judge Cadmus," said Ripon from the armchair. "Your career on the bench was memorable. I may as well tell you frankly what has just happened. Our first impression, that Marcia Cadmus's death was accident, has turned out to be wrong. She was murdered, stabbed with a stick-file. Can you tell me anything that would throw light on who murdered her or why?"

The classic question. John had an impish impulse to cry out, "Everyone wanted to murder her. There were a thousand reasons." But for the first time he realized that a witness could not tell the whole truth. For the first time he was seeing law from the other side where a man's own family and friends were involved. He lied soberly and steadily. "I don't know anyone who had any reason to kill Marcia. How can you be sure it was murder?"

"By the fact that the body was moved after death. Post-mortem lividity shows that she must have been sitting upright for some time before someone moved her to a prone position on the floor as we found her. Also, we found fingerprints on the broken heel of the shoe that had fallen off, badly blurred—by intention, no doubt. Obviously, someone tried to make her death look as if she had tripped and fallen on the file."

John felt a stifling constriction in his chest. Christine had bungled everything in those first moments of shock and panic. With an effort he asked quietly, "Is there any other evidence of murder?"

"That's enough, isn't it? How-

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ever, there were fingerprints on the base of the stick-file, too smudged to identify, but enough to show that someone had held that stick-file by its base upside down, recently. You don't carry a stick-file by its base upside down. If you did, the papers on the file would fall off. But if it's being used as a dagger—"

"Marcia herself?" ventured John.

"No, not suicide. The prints are too large for her own hand. All this may not be courtroom evidence, but it convinced me. So, you see, someone did want to kill Marcia Cadmus." Ripon turned to Paul. "In most cases we think first of the husband. Fortunately for you, that seems unlikely this time."

"Unlikely?" John repeated timidly.

"Yes." Ripon turned back to John: "Our doctor believes that death occurred before midnight. Mrs. Cadmus was last seen alive by her maid at 8:30 P.M. Your nephew has a reliable witness who will swear that he and I were together from quarter of eight to one o'clock."

"And that witness is—?"

"Myself."

Christine's moan was loud in the stillness. John could not meet the gaze. He looked at Paul. "I'm glad of that, boy."

"So am I!" Paul grinned wryly. "Don't you remember I went out shortly after dinner? I was going to see Ripon then. I didn't get home until one thirty. I left my car in the garage and went up the back stairs from the kitchen to my own room. So I had no idea what had happened in the living-room."

"If our doctor were less sure of the time," said Ripon, "we would have to consider the possibility that Paul killed his wife, either before he came to meet me or afterward, when he reached home. As it is, almost anyone could have killed her. A French window in the living-room was standing open. And I shouldn't be too surprised if the murderer had an accomplice. The thick pile of that Persian rug takes impressions. We were able to make out two pairs of footprints near the body, the heels and length of stride suggest a man of medium height and a short, small woman working together."

John said boldly, "That description could apply to dozens of people, even to Miss Lavery and myself."

"I know," agreed Ripon. "If Paul were more directly incriminated we might suspect that his uncle and his friend did it to protect him."

"Colonel Ripon, I am too wise in the ways of the law to tamper with evidence." The note of sincerity in John's voice was not forced: he meant it.

"At the moment we are looking for something in Marcia Cadmus's past to explain what happened,"

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went on Ripon. "Three days ago she drew all her money out of a savings account in cash—nearly ten thousand dollars. That money was still in her possession at the time of her death, but it does suggest blackmail. Do you know anything about her history, Judge Cadmus?"

"Only what she told me." John hesitated. "Her statements were not always—accurate. But one of our neighbors on the hill, Mrs. Hamlin, has a guest at the present time, a Mr. Harvey Graham. I have a suspicion that he might be able to tell you something of Marcia's history."

Paul looked up, surprised.

Ripon was impassive. "Why do you suspect that?"

John glanced uneasily at Paul. "I haven't told you about this. It seemed wiser not to, but now—I saw them on the train together two days ago coming from New York—Marcia and this Harvey Graham. They didn't see me, and the man left the train at Middlebury. Later, in Bradbury, when I told Marcia I had seen her with a man on the train, she denied it point-blank. I was startled when the man himself appeared at our house after dinner with Rachel Hamlin, for he and Marcia both behaved as if they had never seen each other before."

"I must talk to this Mr. Graham," said Ripon quickly. "And then the local police will want to take statements from both of you. How did they behave on the train? As friends or enemies?"

John had a swift vision of Marcia's animated face. "I had an impression that she was enjoying the encounter. I didn't see his face."

"He sounds more like an old flame than a blackmailer," mused Ripon. "But if so, why lie about him?"

"I don't know," murmured John.

Paul stirred restlessly. "Colonel Ripon, my uncle is sparing my feelings. I regret to tell you that my wife was a psychopath who would tell any falsehood, however unnecessary, for sheer love of lying. The fact that she lied is therefore no proof that her association with this man was not innocent."

Ripon frowned. "You mean we cannot treat any statement of hers as evidence of anything?"

"Sometimes a lie itself is a clue," suggested John. "Marcia's lies were like dreams, fragments of reality woven into the fabric of fantasy at random. They might be useful clues if you could sift them free of the fantasy."

Ripon looked thoughtfully at John. "Can you recall anything she told you about her past?"

"Only the other day she said she was brought up in a small, dull fishing village. She said she married her first husband there when she left school."

"The first husband's name?"

"Rick. Richard I suppose. Richard Damien."

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"And the name of the town?"

John wondered why Ripon's gaze was so intent. "Surely, Paul has told you already. It was Jenkinsville, Oregon."

"Yes, Paul told me." Ripon sat back, with a sigh. "So we telegraphed the Oregon state police, but they replied that there is no village of Jenkinsville in Oregon. And, according to WAC records, Marcia Cadmus enlisted as Marcia Damien, wife of Albert Damien, both of San Francisco. But the only Albert and Marcia Damien who lived in San Francisco at that time both died the year before we entered the war. She must have got hold of the woman's identification papers, her birth certificate and marriage certificate, and produced them as her own, or she could hardly have sailed through the army investigation of its own personnel under false colors even in the most confused and hectic period of the war.

"Apparently, everything she told you and Paul about her past was the product of a diseased mind. As far as the records go, her past is a blank, as if she had not existed at all until she appeared in Des Moines to join the WAC in 1943. Now she is gone as mysteriously, her death as enigmatic as her life. Who was she?"

John was remembering Marcia's passionate cry: *Paul will never be able to push me back into the outer darkness I came from.*

"The next step is to question Harvey Graham." Ripon was on his feet. "Would you care to go with me this afternoon, Judge Cadmus? It always pays to confront a fellow like that with an eyewitness."

Over Paul's protest, John spoke resolutely. "I should like nothing better."

Paul went down to the front door with Ripon. Christine turned stricken eyes to John. "I didn't help much."

"It was your best judgment at that time," he reminded her soberly. "If you were wrong, well, you'll just have to accept that and go on to the next thing."

They were silent as they heard Paul's step. He came in and shut the door. "Well!" he said quietly. "It's nice to know that my own uncle and my best friend believe me capable of murder."

Christine flushed painfully. "It was I who moved the body, Paul. Your uncle had nothing to do with it. He tried to stop me."

John leaned back against his pillows. "I wasn't quite quick enough to stop her. She did it for you."

"You expect me to be grateful? Ripon suspects both of you. Naturally, he thinks you did it to protect me, and that doesn't help allay his suspicion of me. The two people who know me best think that I killed Marcia. So much so that they broke the law to protect me."

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"It was my idea, not your uncle's," said Christine. "Your uncle had just come upon the body and he was dazed with shock. He hardly realized what I was doing at first and when he did he tried to stop me."

"Because I knew you can't mislead the police by tampering with evidence," put in John. "Not because I believed you incapable of murder, Paul."

"Who broke the hands off the watch?" asked Paul.

"I did," said Christine. "It had stopped at eleven thirty."

"You thought I couldn't possibly have an alibi for that time?"

"Well . . ." Christine hesitated.

"As you know now, I did have an alibi. If Marcia's watch had been left as it was, the inference would have been that it stopped when she was stabbed and fell. In other words, that she died within a minute of so of eleven twenty. As it is, no one can tell exactly when she died. Medical evidence on time of death always has a considerable margin either way. So I could have killed her when I got back to the house at one thirty. And don't think Ripon doesn't realize that! But only you and Uncle John, who actually saw the watch, will ever know that I have an airtight alibi.

"Of course, I realize that a good alibi is suspicious in itself. I could have stopped the hands of the watch at eleven twenty myself, just because I had arranged to be with Ripon at that particular time. Still, won't you, just for the sake of argument, consider the possibility that it was not I who killed Marcia? That in destroying evidence of her murder you were not protecting me, but someone else, the real murderer. Someone who, if he is frightened enough, may do something desperate again?"

"But your uncle and I can tell them the truth now!" exclaimed Christine.

Paul shook his head. "They'd probably think you were just lying to protect me. But if they did believe you, the charge against you would be serious—deliberate tampering with evidence in a homicide case."

"That should be our last resort," said John. "If everything else fails to clear you."

Paul looked at him somberly. "Of course, if I really were the murderer, this is just the way I would talk, isn't it? Bluff, bluster, righteous indignation. And you both thought me capable of murder. Yet it never occurred to me that either of you were even capable of touching a dead body."

His glance rested on Christine's hands. Well, John knew what a cancerous growth suspicion can become in criminal cases, devouring all mutual faith and trust. He was glad that Christine, her gaze on the floor, seemed unaware of Paul's glance. Was Paul wondering about

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the leather gloves she had happened to be wearing this hot morning in the country?

Rachel Hamlin's house was built on the same plan as Paul's and by the same architect. But where Paul's interior blended modern space and convenience with seasoned old furniture, Rachel had made her interior aggressively modern, all fluid lines and strident colors. John didn't care for it, but Ripon said, "Nice room."

Rachel came in, trim as ever in slacks and sweater. With her came Harvey, a burly figure who moved in a rolling, shuffling walk. Like a bear, thought John.

At the first question, Rachel took over. "Colonel Ripon, I know nothing about what happened last night, but I must tell you about what happened yesterday at the swimming pool. A radio was playing near the edge of the pool and fell in just after Marcia had climbed out. A second sooner it would have killed her. It did kill a little dog belonging to me. At the time I thought it an accident, but now—"

"Paul Cadmus told me about that," said Ripon. "Do you recall just how the radio came to fall into the water?"

"Someone tripped the cord." Rachel looked at John and hesitated. "I don't know just who. Harvey, you were at that end of the pool. Did you see who it was?"

"Look here, Rachel, if you're trying to say that I—" he stammered.

"Of course not! I just wondered if you had seen who—"

"Of course I saw, and so did you!" Harvey's eyes turned to John defiantly. "It was Paul Cadmus."

"If I might interpolate a word, Colonel Ripon," said John. "The radio toppled off the table because its cord lay along the ground under one leg of a chair. Anyone who moved the chair would send the radio into the water. The only way to prove murderous intent would be to prove that someone deliberately placed the radio cord in that position. It's true that such a person could have killed Marcia when she was in the pool by moving the chair, but it's also true that another person, who had no idea where the cord lay, could have moved the chair and killed Marcia or anyone else unintentionally. Marcia was in and out of the pool every few minutes. The person who arranged the cord may have been watching for his chance when Paul inadvertently sprang the trap too soon, catching only a poor little dog. There's nothing about all this to indicate who Marcia's murderer was."

"I've thought of another possibility." Rachel lit a cigarette and leaned back in her chair. "Suppose the purpose of the radio trap was to kill the victim that *was* actually killed."

"But there was no victim," exclaimed Harvey. "Only a dog."

"That's what I mean." She smiled

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at him through smoke. "Irish terriers are scrappy little brutes and good watchdogs. If someone wanted to enter the Cadmus house last night to kill Marcia, it would be quite sensible to get rid of the only dog on this hill first and quite clever to make the killing look accidental. Tippy was sure to go in the pool yesterday. He always did."

"But see here!" Harvey was almost shouting. "That would mean that Marcia was killed by someone outside the Cadmus house, and there's nobody near by but you and me."

"And Dr. Kopeck and his sister," added Rachel.

"Kopeck?" Ripon's brows twisted quizzically. "A mathematician of his distinction—"

"Is probably a little unbalanced," suggested Rachel. "All his mental development has gone in one direction."

Colonel Ripon decided to carry the war into a new direction. "Does either of you have an alibi for last night?"

"I'm afraid not," Rachel answered calmly. "Each of us went to bed about ten o'clock."

"Is this a purely social visit, Mr. Graham?" inquired Ripon.

"No. Business. I invited myself up here because I wanted to buy television rights to Rachel's old plays."

"When did you first meet Marcia Cadmus?"

"Night before last, when Rachel took me over to the Cadmus's."

"I can't accept that," Ripon said flatly. "You were seen on the train with Mrs. Cadmus the previous evening."

"That's a lie," said Harvey indignantly. "Who says so?"

"I say so," put in John. "It was I who saw you."

Ruddy color mounted Harvey's cheeks and neck. "It must have been someone else with Marcia who looked like me. I came by car from New York."

"You were wearing the same tan suit you are wearing now," insisted John.

"How close were you to me?"

"You were at the middle of the car. I was at the end."

"Was I facing you?"

"No," admitted John. "But I'm convinced it was you. The head and ears can be distinctive. Police use them for identification."

Harvey turned to Ripon. "He saw the back of some man talking to Marcia half the length of the car away, by artificial light, and he says he is sure it was I!"

"It will be a simple matter to check with your garage in New York and find out if you really did come up here by car."

Harvey's thick lips clamped together. "Okay, if it's so damned important!" he growled. "Marcia was a pickup on the train. She was good-looking and approachable. So we got to talking."

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"And you had no idea who she was?" demanded Ripon.

Harvey was no longer the fluent, practical liar. He was frightened. "Well," he said at last, "I had never actually met her but, of course, I knew who she was."

"You mean you knew she was Mrs. Paul Cadmus?" Ripon asked him.

"No. I didn't know that. But I knew she used to be in radio on the West Coast. I had seen her picture in newspapers and magazines out there before the war. She was half of one of those chatty husband-and-wife programs on a local California station. *Breakfast with Rick and Rita.* She was Rita. They used her face in ads—she photographed well. I was playing piano on another program at the same station, but we never met."

"That is interesting," said Ripon. "For we've been unable to find out anything about Marcia Cadmus's past before she joined the WAC in 1943. At that time she gave a false birthplace, San Francisco, and a false name, Marcia Damien. Later she told Paul Cadmus and his family that she came from a nonexistent village of Jenkinsville in Oregon."

"I don't know anything about her past!" snapped Harvey. "You know how it is in show business. Nobody has a past or a future—only a present. She was just Rita on the *Rick and Rita* program. They signed contracts as Richard and Rita Rohan, a trade name for the team. But, according to their publicity, they really were married. That's all I know about them. I never saw Rick except in photos. Skinny little guy."

"Jenkinsville, Oregon, is pure fiction?" Rachel's eyes were avid. "What an elaborate lie!"

"I don't believe it was all lie," said John. "I think she was talking about her real home, only she changed the name of the town to mislead her hearers."

"Couldn't she have been mixing up several towns?" said Rachel.

"She could, but if she had, some inconsistency would have betrayed her, and it didn't. I think she was talking about one town, a real one. A fishing town built on a hill like a pyramid, with a church at the top, canneries and smokehouses for herring along the waterfront. Thirty feet of mud flats at low tide and tall, bare trees with narrow leaves, that grew red berries in the fall."

"I never heard of such a tree," protested Rachel.

"Neither have I," said Harvey. But his tone was uncertain.

"One more question, Mr. Graham," said Ripon. "Why did you leave the train at Middlebury the other night when you were on your way to Bradbury, where the train was going?"

"Because I had left my car in Middlebury to be repaired a week earlier and I wanted to pick it up."

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Ripon rose. "You'll both be staying here for the next few days?"

"But I have a TV program in New York," began Harvey.

"It will have to wait. Good day."

Ripon opened the door of his car for John. "Back to Miss Lavery's?"

"I'd rather you dropped me at Dr. Kopeck's," said John.

The road was a descending spiral coiled around the hill. Halfway down, the car stopped at Kopeck's door, and John got out. "Good night, Colonel."

"Good night, Judge."

The Kopeck's home was less pretentious than Rachel's. As John entered the shabby, comfortable living-room, he was greeted by a full orchestra playing Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. He could hardly believe that the magnificent tone came from the tiny radio in a plain, battered, leather case.

Kopeck smiled. "I made it myself, incorporating a few little electronic devices of my own."

Minna was knitting placidly in front of the fire. "You look tired, Mr. Cadmus," she said. "Sit down and rest."

Kopeck found a chair opposite John's. "What is worrying you? Paul?"

John nodded. "He's more like a son to me than a nephew."

Kopeck sighed. "He has been almost like a son to me since we began working together. You think the police suspect him?" he said.

"I don't know." John frowned. "They suspect everybody."

"I know," agreed Kopeck. "I'm sure they suspect me. The layman doesn't understand anything about higher mathematics, and he fears what he doesn't understand. I'm supposed to live in stratospheric clouds far above human hopes and fears. Possibly beyond human ideas of right and wrong. At least, that is what I think the police think. Of course, it isn't so. I am a very ordinary human being whose mind happens to have developed in one direction at the expense of others."

"But what possible motive could you have for killing Marcia?"

"A very simple one. Marcia disliked me because I remonstrated with her for lying to Ripon about Paul. She retaliated by threatening to tell Ripon that I was a dangerous alien, perhaps a Communist. You heard her yourself that first night at dinner. Of course, I am not a Communist. I have never taken any part in politics at all. And I was cleared by the F.B.I. during the war. It was anemia that prevented my going overseas, as Minna said. But fifty-six years ago I was born in a country that today is under Communist domination. My parents are still there.

"In the present unhappy state of the world that slender foundation might give a certain substance to Marcia's accusation. She could always say that even though I was

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not a Communist myself I might yield to their pressure to save my parents from molestation. Many women might say such things in a sudden flash of temper, but Marcia was a psychopath who would repeat any irresponsible charge under oath if necessary for sheer love of the power it gave her. And some people would believe it.

"If she had gone on talking that way about me it could have developed into something unpleasant in these days, when every physicist must be like Caesar's wife, not only innocent, but beyond the remotest possibility of calumny or suspicion.

"You see? My work means everything in life to me. Marcia knew that. So she tried to strike me there, where I was most vulnerable, where it would hurt the most. If she had ever got as far as the witness stand in a libel suit, she would have been publicly notifying the Communists that they could use my parents as hostages to put pressure on me. She might actually have brought about the very situation she was pretending already existed. That would be a motive for murder, wouldn't it? Protecting two very old people named Kopeck who are now living unmolested in a little country village half the world away, possibly just because no one over there has yet realized they are the parents of Kopeck, the American physicist?"

"I understand," said John. "Lying so indiscriminately, Marcia might, at any moment, utter inadvertently some truth that was dangerous to someone else, such as the fact that your parents are still living in a Communist country. I think she did mix truth with lies several times. That's one reason I came here this evening. I want to check something she said, and I thought I might use your library. I'm trying to identify a tree, a tall, bare tree with narrow leaves, that grows red berries in the fall."

The clicking of Minna's knitting needles stopped. "That's easy. We came here by way of Scotland. It's the rowan tree. Don't you remember the rowan berries in the old Scottish ballads?"

Kopeck went to the bookcase. "Rowan." He was reading aloud. "The mountain ash. Sometimes called roundberry or witchwood."

"It was associated with witches in Scotland," added Minna. "An association that goes back to the Druids and their tree cult."

"Mountain ash." There was a gleam of excitement in John's eyes. "Does it grow only in the mountains over here?"

"No." Kopeck was glancing down a column of fine print. "At sea level rowan trees grow most profusely around the Bay of Fundy, where it's quite as cold as any mountain."

John let out his breath in a long sigh. "I see. That explains everything. And I know Maine. How old I must be getting not to have

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realized all this before!" he said.

"All what?" Kopeck eyed him quizzically.

John rose. "Please let me keep my little secret until I've seen Paul. Is his house near?"

"Just a step," answered Kopeck. "I'll walk over the hill with you and show you the way."

They stepped into a windless twilight. John had an odd feeling that not only the light was failing, the landscape itself seemed to fade before their eyes, solid matter dissolving into a faint shadow on the surface of the evening.

"Don't bother to come any farther." John went down the hill alone without looking back.

In the hollow a pool of deeper shadow had collected. It was like stepping out of twilight into night. Once John thought he heard a footstep. He paused to look around. He could see nothing in motion but the flutter of leaves in a stealthy breeze. He had set his foot on Paul's doorstep, when a light inside the living-room went out.

Cautiously he laid his hand on the doorknob and turned it. The door swung open and he stepped inside. The pale shine of stars came through the open picture window. There was movement in the shadow beside Marcia's desk.

John's voice quavered. "Paul?"

No voice answered. But something had moved again in the shadow at the very spot where Marcia had lain in death. For a moment John could not move. Then he recovered breath. "Looking for that ten thousand?" He walked forward calmly.

Something hard crashed against the side of his head. Reality dissolved into a universe of spinning, golden suns. A rough hand clawed ruthlessly at his collar. He wrenched his head away. Clean, outdoor air from the open window revived him a little. Far below, he could see the concrete drive, empty and pallid in the light of a dim bulb over the garage. There was no screen now. The carpenter had taken it away to put on a new catch. Urgent hands closed on John's shoulders, pushing him across the window seat. It was only then he realized what the hands were trying to do.

One heavy fist pinned him to the sill. A knee thrust itself onto the window seat beside him. Another hand gripped his knee and heaved. With the strength of panic John tensed all his muscles and lurched sidewise, clinging to the edge of the window seat. The hands slipped and lost traction on his knee and shoulder. It was too late to arrest the forward surge of that great, heaving motion. Clawing at air, the other body overbalanced and toppled across the low sill, plummeting like a crippled plane to the hard pavement below. There was no cry. Only a muffled, thick-sounding impact, and silence . . .

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John was still crouching on the window seat, shivering and cold in the warm evening, when the door opened and a switch clicked. John winced. The sudden glare was like a blow across his aching eyeballs.

"You're all right?" Kopeck hurried toward him. "I waited on the hillside watching you go down. I saw the light go out—after you entered the house. That seemed strange. So I followed you."

John covered his eyes with one hand. "You might better call Colonel Ripon, and find Paul. A man is dead. Harvey Graham."

Soon the room was filled with voices: Christine and Rachel and Minna, Paul and Ripon and some of the town police Ripon had notified. But Ripon was still in charge of anything that concerned the Duross Electric research laboratory.

Rachel was the first to speak after John told his story. "Why should Harvey attack you?" The emotion packed so tightly into her voice told John that her interest in Harvey was stronger than she had ever admitted. "You're covering up for Paul. You killed Harvey because Harvey discovered the truth. Paul killed Marcia because she refused to divorce him and he wanted to end his marriage."

"There is one flaw in that reasoning," said John. "Paul was never married to Marcia."

Paul gasped. "What do you mean? I—I did marry her."

"You couldn't marry her," said John. "For the simple reason that her previous marriage was never dissolved. Do you see what an appalling position Marcia was in when you asked her for a divorce? She wanted a big money settlement. Yet legally she had no right to a divorce, let alone a settlement. One cannot dissolve a marriage that doesn't exist.

"She refused to divorce you because the attendant publicity was certain to expose her as a bigamist. News agencies keep an eye on divorce courts as they do on marriage license bureaus. Paul Cadmus, the great Kopeck's assistant, would get a few paragraphs with pictures in the tabloids. Marcia used a false name when she married you, but her photograph would be recognized on the West Coast as the Rita of *Rick and Rita.* Once some news editor assigned a reporter to find out what became of Rick, the fat would be in the fire. There was nothing Marcia could do but refuse to divorce you.

"Later, when she saw how determined you were, she became desperate enough to ask her first husband for help. She went to New York to find him. That's why they were on the train together. He told her to demand a large settlement before she started divorce proceedings, then use the money to run off to some place like South America without starting proceedings at all. That was what she

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meant when she told me that holding you up for a large divorce settlement was not all she had been planning.

"When her first husband demanded ten thousand dollars as the price of his silence, she drew the money out of her savings account to pay him. After leaving Marcia on the train at Middlebury, he came on to Bradbury uninvited to threaten her with his presence until she produced the money. As he was a TV producer, he could invite himself to stay with a neighboring playwright by pretending he wanted to negotiate for television rights to her plays.

"Of course, Richard Rohan was only a trade name on the *Rick and Rita* program. His real name was Harvey Graham. You recall, Colonel Ripon, how transparently careful he was to tell us Rick was a skinny fellow? Not a big, burly man like himself?"

"Are you guessing all this?" demanded Ripon.

"Not quite." John smiled faintly. "Marcia told me she came from Jenkinsville in Oregon, but the fishing village she described was Lindale in Maine, Graham's birthplace. Where else in the United States do you find the mountain ash growing wild in such profusion at a sea level where the daily tide is twenty-five feet or more? She mentioned all those things and the smokehouses and the church on the hill shaped like a pyramid. I've been to Lindale. I should have recognized it at once.

"She must have known Graham for a long time. Everyone knows everyone else in a little place like Lindale. When he played a song on the piano that first night, he looked at Marcia as he said 'That was our signature on the West Coast.' The look suggested that it was not an editorial 'we.' He wasn't lying when he said she was in radio in California. He volunteered that because he knew we would find it out as soon as her picture was published on the West Coast. It would seem suspicious if he, a former radio man, had claimed he did not know that face by sight; and he was still hoping that Richard Rohan might not be identified as Harvey Graham.

"He mentioned that Rick and Rita were 'really married.' If that were true, why go to so much trouble to conceal a perfectly legal relation? Why not appear in Bradbury frankly and openly as Marcia's former husband? Only one circumstance can make a legal marriage scandalous: when it is followed by bigamy.

"As I see it, the pathetic story of Marcia's married life in Lindale was fantasy. She got away as soon as she left school by marrying Graham, already on his way to the West Coast. But she wanted more than he could give her then. So, when he was drafted, she enlisted in the WAC under a false name in

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order to break with her past and get a fresh start. Presumably, she had to do it that way because he had refused to divorce her, through love or vanity, perhaps a mixture of both. And it wasn't easy to divorce a service man during the war without his consent. Marcia was stupid and reckless as well as ambitious. So she married Paul bigamously."

"Then who killed Marcia?" demanded Ripon. "The man who tried to kill you?"

"Who else could it be?" responded John wearily. "Perhaps Harvey Graham wanted to marry another woman who would not care for the publicity if she married a man who had to divorce a first wife for bigamy. In that situation Marcia would have been able to turn the tables and blackmail Graham."

John allowed his gaze to dwell on Rachel. Her eyes remained indifferent, but a deeper color burned through the heavy powder on her cheeks.

"Graham laid two rather clumsy traps for Marcia," John went on. "When both failed she began to suspect him, and fear nerved him to stab her. He went for me when I asked him if he were looking for the ten thousand dollars in Marcia's desk. That told him I had put two and two together about their both coming from Lindale, deducing the previous marriage and the bigamy, his motive for murder . . ."

Paul and Christine were in the garden under the midnight stars. John was alone in front of the fire. It was there that Kopeck came and sat beside him. Kopeck lit his pipe and asked in his most quiet, conversational tone, "Why did you kill Marcia?"

John was silent.

"Harvey Graham had no motive for killing Marcia," went on Kopeck. "She paid him ten thousand to keep still. She was the bigamist. Not Harvey. And he wouldn't risk his neck to marry Rachel. He didn't need her money that badly and he didn't behave as if he loved her. He was conspiring with Marcia to defraud Paul. Why kill the goose that was laying golden eggs?

"You spoke to me yesterday about the plight of a man who sees murder coming and wants to stop it. Not because he wants to protect the potential victim, but because he wants to protect the potential murderer, the second victim as you called him, from the one fate that really is worse than death—killing. It occurs to me now that there is only one way to keep someone you love from becoming a murderer: by becoming a murderer yourself. Is that what happened? Did you kill Marcia to save Paul from becoming a killer?"

At last John looked at Kopeck. "Hasn't it occurred to you that there was only one person in all this group ruthless enough, stupid enough, and neurotic enough to be

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capable of premeditated murder?"

"Who?"

"Marcia herself. She was the only murderer among us."

"What do you mean?"

"The potential murderer was not Paul. It was Marcia. The potential victim was not Marcia. It was myself.

"Who was leaning against the screen when the catch gave way? Not Marcia, but me. Why? Because Marcia had asked me to sit beside her on the window seat, and she had shown me the night before that it was safe to lean against the screen, when I, in my folly, put the idea of such a murder trap into her head.

"Who had just left the swimming pool when the radio fell in? Not only Marcia, but me. Whose was the chair arranged with one leg over the radio cord? Marcia's chair. She left her beach coat there to identify it. She started to leave the pool soon after I entered, believing I would remain, as I should have, if the dog hadn't intervened. She was on her way then to shift the chair leg. But I left the pool a few moments before she expected, and Paul innocently moved the chair when no one was in the water but the dog. Who was first at the pool that day and so had a chance to arrange the radio trap? Either Marcia or Harvey. They were both already there in bathing suits when I arrived. The others were still changing inside the cabaña. Naturally, Marcia showed deep emotion on both these occasions, which I misinterpreted as fear.

"I didn't suspect this until there were two such incidents I could compare. Then I got a cross-bearing from the factors they had in common. Each time, there was no evidence Paul had planned anything and considerable evidence that Marcia had. Each time, there was more danger to me than to Marcia herself.

"She had a motive. She knew I had seen her on the train with Harvey Graham. When she heard Harvey say he came from Lindale and when she learned that I knew Maine, she must have realized I would eventually recognize her description of Jenkinsville as Lindale and know that her association with Harvey was old and established. If I told Paul about her old association with Harvey, Paul would discover the bigamy. Then Marcia would lose every penny she hoped to extort from Paul as an injured wife.

"I finally worked this out in the middle of the night. I had heard Marcia go downstairs. I followed her, intending to tell her that if she would release Paul by telling him the truth about herself and Harvey I would see that she got an adequate settlement, if I had to pay it myself.

"She was at the desk when I came in. She looked up and said contemptuously, 'Oh, it's only you

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. . .' I think my eyes told her what I knew. It is hard to look with detachment at someone who has tried to kill you. I saw a murderous rage come into her eyes. She snatched up the stick-file and came at me. I caught her wrist, trying to push her away. At the height of the struggle she suddenly staggered back, and I saw that the stick-file had pierced her breast. She fell into the chair, her head pitching forward across the desk. By the time I reached her, she was dead. It was a shock, for, even when I was struggling with her for my life, there had not been murder in my heart. But who would believe that? I was afraid I was going to black out, so I went upstairs to get my medicine. I fell across the bed and went into a deep sleep from nervous exhaustion.

"When I woke, about seven, I knew I had to be the one to discover the body. If Paul found it, that might turn suspicion in his direction. So I got up and went downstairs.

"Tonight, when I came into this house and asked Harvey if he were looking for that ten thousand, he must have realized that I knew about his plot with Marcia to defraud Paul, and he must have been afraid of being charged as her accessory in the attempts to murder me. If I were dead, Harvey Graham would be safe, so he attacked.

"A strange ending for a judge, isn't it?"

"Ending?" Kopeck smiled. "You don't think I'm going to give you up to the police, do you?"

"No. But there is a higher court." John looked at the stars beyond the window. "I'm due there."

"I noticed you had given up smoking and drinking," murmured Kopeck. "Heart?"

"What they call a stroke. The second is usually fatal. Shock is supposed to bring it on. But all the shocks of the last few days left me intact, as if something inside me wouldn't let me die until I had done this thing for Paul."

"Then it really was for Paul?"

"I suppose so. It's a technicality to say it was self-defense. I doubt if I would kill to save my own life at this age. Do you remember Walter Scott's description of his first stroke? *This shaking hands with death* . . . Perhaps I was able to look death in the face these last few days because he is no longer a stranger to me. Rather an old friend with whom I have already shaken hands."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**ELEANOR DALY BOYLAN**
TITLE:	***The Methodical Man***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Sergeant Frost
LOCALE:	A university in the United States
COMMENTS:	*The Professor of Ancient History had loved Angela, but Angela had married the football coach . . . Teachers in universities do not always lead sheltered lives . . .*

IT WAS THE THIRD OF FOUR ITEMS scribbled in pencil on Professor Whitman's pad:

return books to library
have car washed
kill Angela
meet Babs

Stunned as they were by the murder and by the identity of the murderer, no one at the University was particularly surprised by the list. The pad had been discovered, after Whitman had vanished, in the bottom drawer of the professor's desk, and merely bore out the general opinion that he was one of the most methodical men alive.

Robert Whitman had always made lists of his projected activities. Notes, jottings, and memos beat out the staccato of his days. His fastidious precision was legend. Students groaned over it, friends smiled at it, and his landlady rejoiced in it. He had been known to consult his memo pad in the grandstand ten seconds before a touchdown, then carefully take a vitamin pill. Pupils whose papers were an iota short of being totally meticulous suffered discouraging grades. One could set one's watch by the Professor's daily entrance into Shelborn Hall where he taught classes in Ancient History.

The story had gone round that he had once proposed marriage to Angela Purdie, memo pad in hand, enumerating the pros and cons of her future life as his partner. Pre-

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sumably the story had come from Angela—who else?—told most amusingly before she married Vin Macy, the football coach. Now four years later, Whitman had made a note to kill her, had committed the murder, and disappeared . . .

The day after Angela's body had been found in a ravine on the far side of the ball park, Sergeant Frost, a middle-aged, balding policeman, sat beside Vin Macy in the attractive living-room of the coach's faculty house. The Sergeant had just checked by telephone on the validity of the first two items on the professor's list. Both the library and the garage confirmed that Whitman had indeed appeared, at about nine and eleven o'clock respectively on the morning of the murder. The "Babs" of Item Four, who the press had fondly hoped was "another woman," turned out, prosaically enough, to be Dr. Babson, assistant dean, with whom Whitman was writing a book. They were to have met in Babson's office at seven in the evening but Whitman had not shown up.

Now, in a lovely autumn dusk, Coach Macy stared ahead of him in a dazed way, replying haltingly to the policeman's questions. Yes, he and his wife had known Whitman for years; no, he would not have believed the professor capable of murder; yes, Whitman came frequently to their home and was always welcome; no, he refused to believe that his wife was interested in the professor, or even *vice versa*—"Damn it, you assume the poor guy is guilty just because he's missing! How do you know he isn't lying in a ditch somewhere himself while the man who really killed my wife is having a beer at the airport and catching a plane out?"

"It's possible." Frost reached into his breast pocket and took out the damaging notebook. "But his list—"

"That cockeyed list! It must be forged or something."

"I'm afraid not." The Sergeant spoke with quiet deliberation. He had a reputation for being the least bit slow. "You have an excellent laboratory for this sort of thing right here at the University. They say it's Whitman's handwriting beyond a doubt."

"Look, Bob was methodical—but not *that* methodical. I had lunch with him, I tell you, less than three hours before they say Angela died. If he had been planning—"

"Yes. I'm surprised he didn't make a note of that appointment."

"It wasn't an appointment. We just happened to meet going into the campus coffee shop. Come to think of it," Macy became excited, "he took out that memo pad of his while we were having dessert and that was when he made the note to meet Babs. You'll never get me to believe that he'd produce a pad with a note to murder my wife on it and me sitting right next to him at the counter!" Macy glared

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triumphantly at the policeman.

"No," said Frost, looking at the list thoughtfully, "I don't believe he would."

"Then it *must* be forged!"

"It's no use, Mr. Macy. The writing has been proved absolutely genuine. But there's one interesting thing . . ." The Sergeant continued to stare at the list as though hypnotized. "It seems that Whitman must have made an erasure on it somewhere. A few grains of india rubber showed up under the microscope."

"Really? May I see it?" Macy took the pad and squinted at it intently under the light. "It can't have been much of an erasure. Shouldn't there be some roughness showing on the paper?"

"Yes, but not necessarily to the naked eye."

Out on the drive a police car stopped and a young officer put his startled face in the door.

"Sergeant, you'd better come. They've found Professor Whitman. He's hung himself in one of the showers in the gym."

Frost rose but Vin Macy collapsed on the sofa, his shoulders heaving. "No, no . . . Angela, now Bob . . . not both . . ."

He was sobbing even more hysterically half an hour later when he was arrested for the double murder of his wife and friend.

Sergeant Frost hadn't gone to the gym. He had merely looked at the young policeman and said, "Thanks, Wade. Will you wait for me in the car?" Then he stood beside the sofa, patting the coach's shoulder gently, talking at random as one does to unnerved persons. And all the while Frost kept staring at the professor's list . . .

Outside, Officer Wade fidgeted, longing to return to the excitement at the gym. Suddenly he leaped from the car as a crash and a shout from the coach's living-room preceeded the flying figure of Macy himself, hurtling out the front door as though charging at an opponent's goal.

At pistol point, Wade escorted him back into the house where Sergeant Frost was just replacing the phone.

"I meant to ask you," Frost said courteously, "when did you change the memo?"

Macy said dully, "At lunch. He left the notebook on the counter when he went to the men's room. I looked in it and that third notation made me see red. I knew he and Angela had been seeing each other. I'd been sick and furious about it for weeks. But those two innocent-looking words drove me insane. He and his damn memos! He might just as well have made a note: 'wreck Macy's life.' I knew he wasn't in the men's room. He was talking to Angela right then. I took the memo pad out to my car and changed the word. When he came out I called him and

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handed him the pad. He put it in his pocket and I offered him a lift. It wasn't hard to get him to stop at the gym . . ." Macy was breaking down fast. "Afterwards . . . after I'd strangled him. . . . I took the notebook out of his pocket and put it in his desk."

When presently the distraught coach was taken away, Officer Wade wide-eyed with bewilderment and admiration, began:

"Sergeant, will you please tell me how you—"

Frost opened Professor Whitman's notebook to a fresh page. He wrote the words

and said, "A single stroke—a slanting line just before, and touching, the C; a tiny erasure—the left side and top of the *a;* add a dot—and you almost make another man commit your murder. Almost, but not quite."

What the critics think of *EQMM* . . .

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— Avis DeVoto, Boston Sunday Globe

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**SIMON STILL**
TITLE:	***Kelman's Eyes***
TYPE:	Crime Story
ASSASSIN:	Laggan Boyne
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*The murdered man's eyes "were planted deep in Boyne's brain, like seed potatoes, to grow there." Later came the "rat's tooth of memory." A distinguished and poetic "first story."*

ON A WINTER EVENING NEAR THE end of 1955 the "liquidation committee" of the Old Party held a briefing meeting in the top room of Riley's Saloon over in dockland. The one item of business on the agenda was the liquidating of Padraic Kelman, the boss of the meat packers who ran a political moderation team, blasting his way to power with the brass voice and leather lungs he had cultivated in his revolution days.

The method used by the committee to choose the assassin was simple. They cut up the current month of the calendar into its separate days, and put all the numbers into a hat. Everybody then picked and went on picking till one picked the present day. The one who did that was Laggan Boyne, a thin scarecrow of a man with a face that looked to be made of old wax, and all the life he had burning away in his dark eyes. He was the kind of man not given to words, speaking only in a calico whisper, into a chosen ear at a chosen time. A good man for this kind of job.

The meeting, having done its business, dispersed as silently as it had assembled, and went its separate ways to await results. They came less than a fortnight later when, on a January night, Laggan Boyne obeyed the order of the Old Party by pushing four inches of a pointed glittering knife into the broad beefy back of boss Padraic Kelman. Being a careful and technically efficient assassin, Boyne had

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spent some time over a study of comparative anatomy, and he knew the exact space between two certain ribs where a knife would do its quickest and cleanest work.

All the same, Laggan Boyne wasn't too happy about the business. It was a bad job and it displeased him, for he liked to think he was somewhat of an artist in methods of liquidation. This killing of Kelman failed to satisfy his artistic temperament and that made him uncomfortable.

The plan he had made the day after his briefing had to be altered at the last minute. This plan called for a room with a table and maybe a couple of chairs handy; Kelman could have been left dead in a place like that, and looked no worse than drunk to the man who had killed him. Failing the room, a car might have done—or anything that would have given the right sort of soft background. Kelman was the type of victim who needed upholstery for his death.

In a manner of speaking, of course, he had plenty of upholstery, but unfortunately not the right kind. Not the right texture or even the right color. The couch for Kelman's death was snow—pure, cold, and white. That was because Kelman, who always imagined he was God in the Garden of Eden after a big speech, had insisted on walking through the park instead of going home decently in the car Laggan Boyne had fixed for him.

To Laggan Boyne, artist in assassination, that snow somehow spoiled the picture. It lay deep and soft, like whipped cream on a trifle, only smoother—hellish smooth.

Blood looks its bloodiest lying on snow. Scarlet gouts, half dollars in red, a blasphemy on the whipped-cream world. And then there was no decent place to bury a knife, not without it showing. Great bloody hoofmarks all over the place. Arragh, what a clumsy amateurish job it looked to Boyne's professional eye.

Those footprints! Great blasted deep ones, holding in their telltale sockets the kiss of his own rubber soles and heels. Telling his story to the gray sky and soon telling it to the police. That called for some more emergency thinking that hadn't been in the original plan.

Laggan Boyne felt his temper rising to meet the occasion. He swore a string of oaths, and broke out in a sweat. Panic was a new sensation to him; it tore at his nerves and took charge of his limbs. He hacked a branch of laurel off a bush with the pointed knife and some of Kelman's cold blood was left painted on the stump by the blade. Laggan Boyne did not worry about that because blood on a tree did not point to anyone, and he was wearing gloves.

Only something else was worrying him, giving him a sort of fluttering stage fright like an actor will get when he has forgotten his lines.

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He swept the snow into a feverish huddle with the laurel branch, to cover his footprints, and then he threw the laurel over Kelman's dead and twisted face. He wanted to shout out, "There's a wreath for ye, Traitor Kelman," but his lips had gone out of business for a while. Even the throwing of the laurel was clumsy and confused and planless. The way it landed was clumsy too, for it only covered half of the dead man's face, throwing the other half into relief. It left Laggan Boyne with a burning picture of Kelman's dead staring eyes.

Kelman's eyes! From that minute they were planted deep in Boyne's brain, like seed potatoes, to grow there.

He tore his own eyes off the body and glared round, but could see nothing else to do. It was time to be moving before some night prowler saw him and raised an alarm. With stiff dead fingers he bunched his old greasy coat closer round his thin neck and pulled his black velour down over his eyes to hide the bits of naked fear that had begun to float in them. Then he went away from the thing he had done, sliding into the shadows.

Laggan Boyne did not look on that night like a man who had once roared out of his leather lungs at the faces of five hundred men, and got his answer on the dot from five hundred rifles springing to five hundred shoulders. He did not look like Commandant Boyne of the Old Party. That was a scene he liked to remember when he was down by a fire with a drop of hot whiskey and maybe a trusted ear hard by to talk into.

But not this night. This night had no memory. This night had no fire, no drink, and no ears. This night had only cold and eyes—cold snow and dead eyes.

Laggan Boyne felt suddenly tired and old. He was all used up with doing the wrong things, and he was wise enough to know that it is the wrong things that burn a man away. His brain felt like an empty bottle being tilted up to let the dregs of stale thoughts come dripping down to his cold hands and colder feet.

Down to his stone fingers and his stone toes went the drip, drip, drip of his old thoughts, and wakened them up to life and some urgency. They rang their little bells of alarm, they lit their little lamps of fear. And they made some hurry in the legs of him.

He went out of the park quicker now, his tortured mind chased by eyes all round him in the luminous dark—eyes that weren't seen, but were felt and heard. They were like velvet balls that brushed on his cheek, and clung to him as he passed.

Through the big iron gates he went, and then by quiet streets toward the yellow light of the railway station. When he got there he kept far away from the light, going

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along the empty platform till he came to the cleak that catches the mail bags. He stood there for a while till suddenly he looked up and saw the iron cleak in the shape of a gallows, and his nerves wakened up to bite some cold sweat out of him, so that he began to walk up and down, and into the place marked *GENTLEMEN*. Even there the eyes followed him.

He was glad when a train came so that he could creep into an empty compartment to lie his whole length on the seat and cry. He cried bitterly.

That was a queer thing for a Commandant to do, who had a new made corpse behind him and an old red knife tucked away inside his shabby coat.

He cried generously too, in an ugly, slobbering way, out of his eyes and down his long white nose. It sounded like a pig drinking water. To Laggan Boyne it was an important technical thing this crying. It seemed to him that it took away some of the loneliness and fear of being an assassin; and another thing it took away was the dried-starch look of his face so that it got softer, and people were not tempted to look at it as if it was a cinema screen showing a crime thriller.

So Laggan Boyne cried without stint for ten minutes, and then he slept. In his sleep the tear-soaked face broke away from the rusty moorings of all his knowledge and cunning, and drifted gently about in a dreamless sea of innocence. He looked like a baby needing a shave.

When he wakened everything seemed better. His heart was steadier, his nerves calmer, and he began to think of picking up the plan again. Outside the train window he could hear the swish of the world rushing past behind the wall of night. It was a clean, sweet sound. It was a clean, sweet world without Padraic Kelman.

Now his mind began to light up inside with the glow of the public benefactor! He had at last rid the world of Padraic Kelman.

"It's God's Washing Day," he said to himself aloud, listening to the words as if someone else had spoken them. There was no blasphemy in his mind, only a picture of sweet green fields and the lives of men climbing up over sudden death to better things tomorrow.

Laggan Boyne had got his face well under control again when the station he was waiting for came along. When he left the train his feet were sure of themselves, even as they marched over the iron bridge that rang out an Angelus for the dead he had left behind him.

He went straight to the house of a man called Shemus Sullivan, and gave a peculiar knock on the door. He must have been expected

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for the door was opened at once by a man who did not look as if he had been in bed.

A bit of a whisper, and Laggan Boyne was safe inside, sitting by a good fire steaming his coat, and listening to the comforting sound of whiskey falling into a glass. Then he was drinking it slowly, giving his dry tongue a warm bath, while this Sullivan creature cavorted round him like a bat near a candle, darting in and out of the shadows.

When the glass was empty, Laggan Boyne said, "Well, old comrade, I've finished it." So Shemus Sullivan filled two glasses, and they clinked them together in a toast to the Old Party.

They had two or three more till Laggan Boyne got melodramatic and threw his empty glass into the stone hearth where it died in bits with a thin protesting wail. Sullivan did the same, and then they both lay down on the floor and went to sleep before the fire, while the bed waited empty in the room upstairs.

Once in the long night Laggan Boyne wakened with a skull-piercing scream and shouted out that the eyes were stabbing his heart, but Shemus Sullivan threw a cushion over his face and told him not to be a bloody fool. The assassin turned on his side and went to sleep again, sobbing like a lost child.

In the morning it was different. The whiskey was done and the fire was gone. The cold came at them, pressing its face against the window, storming under the crack of the door, digging up through the floorboards, biting through clothes and flesh to the bones, and through the bones to the marrow.

Laggan Boyne got up first, shuddering with the cold and feeling the first rat's tooth of memory. The floor had been hard on his body so that it was sore all over, and the work of yesterday had been hard on his mind. His mind was bruised and tender like a rotten tooth with a naked nerve, and everything in this room hurt it. The light hitting his eyes was a silent scream.

Shemus Sullivan still slept, a gray obscenity in the gray room. He was a man who ate his way through sleep without a snore, with barely a breath. He looked like a man calmly enjoying the first installment of death.

Laggan Boyne suddenly hated Shemus Sullivan. He wanted to kill him for lying there while he was up, for having such an empty peaceful mind while his was heaped with violent death, pinned to his skull with two staring eyes. Those eyes! They never left him alone, but bit their way through light and darkness to reach him, till he sweated with fear. Till his heart got like a stone, hard to get blood from.

Now he saw the knife lying on

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the table and wanted to plunge it into the sleeping man, so he had to walk up and down heavily to get control of himself. The noise of his feet wakened Sullivan who opened his thin crack of a mouth and demanded, "What the hell is all the noise about?"

"We've got things to do," grated Laggan Boyne, "in case maybe ye've forgot."

"Oh, what's all the flamin' hurry? Sure we've plenty time."

"Plenty time? Would ye listen to him, and me on the run?"

Shemus Sullivan rose then, but slowly, inertly. He lifted his body out of its sleep like a man taking things from a deep drawer. A leg. An arm. Last of all, his brain. When he got that out he said, "I think we'd better have a fire."

"I'm hungry," complained Laggan Boyne, like a petulant child.

"The fire first," said Shemus Sullivan, "In due order of precedence, the fire first."

"Don't talk like a bloody minute book," growled Boyne. "For God's sake get on with it."

Shemus Sullivan took one look at his guest, and got on with it. He was a quicker man than he looked, and knew about a house, having been ten years a widower. The fire was soon burning and some tea in the making.

They had hardly sat down and wet their lips with the tea when there was a rattle at the door, and something fell through the letter-box. Laggan Boyne started to his feet and his nerves ran up his body like snakes up a ladder.

"Take it easy," said Shemus Sullivan. "It's only the morning paper." He went out and got the paper while Laggan Boyne sat down again and tried to drink his tea with a hand that would not stop trembling.

"Front page news," said Shemus Sullivan, tossing the paper down in front of him. Laggan forgot his breakfast while he devoured the story in the paper. Suddenly he got angry, like an actor who has been misconstrued by a critic. He shouted, "Why the hell do they call it murder? It wasn't murder, it was assassination."

Shemus Sullivan spoke in a small voice. "I suppose its just a matter of opinion. Our opinion is that it was an assassination, theirs is that it was a murder. What does it matter?"

"It matters a hellfire lot to me," growled Laggan Boyne. "I'm no murderer."

Shemus Sullivan squinted at him over the table. He shrugged, his hands rising and weaving around like two thin doves of peace.

"I mean what does it matter what *they* think, Laggan. Leave it to history. History will iron it out."

"History!" Laggan Boyne snorted and shoved his face into the tea mug.

After breakfast Shemus Sullivan washed and dressed himself care-

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fully and neatly in his Sunday black, to look like a man about some quiet sedentary business, some hobby of the mind or spirit.

Laggan Boyne watched him, eyes narrow as a cat's, and suddenly snapped out, "Where are ye goin', all dressed up like a weddin' —or is it a wake?" he added slowly in a dark way.

Shemus Sullivan sighed and looked at him with patient sorrow. "Now," he said, "there's a question to ask at a time like this. 'Where are ye goin'?' says he, 'Where are ye goin'?' Laggan Boyne, are ye forgettin' the plan?"

"To hell with the plan," shouted Laggan Boyne. "I want to know where ye are goin'?"

"Quietly, quietly! Ye don't want the world to know, do ye? I'm goin' where the plan said I was to go. To the city to arrange for ye to get away."

For a moment the two men stood eyeing each other in silence. And then: "When will ye be back again?" asked Laggan Boyne suspiciously. He was thinking now of the time he would be left alone in this place. Thinking of it, and dreading it.

"Tomorrow," replied Shemus Sullivan. "Late on."

"What—a whole day?"

"It's not so easy makin' contacts in these days. Not so easy, and not so quick as slippin' a knife into a man's back."

That bit of jaundiced wisdom woke all hell in Laggan Boyne's heart. His finger itched to wrap themselves round the throat of this gray weasel and gutter the breath of life out of him. But he couldn't do it, knowing that his life now hung on this wizened runt who was the Party's instrument for getting him safely away. Then another thought struck his tortured mind and he voiced it hoarsely. "How the hell do I know that you're not going to the city to sell me up the river?" he said.

Shemus Sullivan shrugged. "As far as I know," he said, "no one has offered to buy ye yet, and I don't think anyone will." Then he got brusque and businesslike. "Pull yourself together, Laggan Boyne, and get yourself easy in body and mind. There's books for you to read here to pass the time, and there's plenty food and coal. I'll be back tomorrow."

With that he was gone, his feet making little crunches with the snow for a minute and then—nothing. Laggan Boyne was alone again, staring at the blank wall, biting his nails, wondering what he would do.

Could he trust Shemus Sullivan? Could he trust anyone now? Even himself. Could he trust himself? Already he had been screaming in his sleep like a terrified kid.

He looked around the room—at the walls, at the window, at the floor, at the table. There Padraic Kelman stared up at him flatly

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and happily from the front page of the newspaper. Smug. Abruptly he snatched up the paper, crumpled it between his clawing hands, and threw into the fire. Then he started to walk up and down, a steady pace, a measured distance, as if he was practising already for the death house.

The fire was bright now, fighting the cold out of the room, thawing the windows and rubbing out the flowers and ferns the frost had drawn there so that he could now see a bit of the street and the house over the way.

The street showed nothing. Just a twisted limb of snow with somebody padding past now and again. A man, a motor lorry with chains on its wheels, a woman with a pram. Nothing else.

But the house showed something. The house had a window exactly opposite this one, and in the window a woman was sitting facing him. Not only the woman facing him, but she was gazing at him steadily and unblinkingly. She was like a kid trying to stare another kid out.

Cold fear ran through him and in a panic he walked away from the window, staying away while he counted fifty, and then walked back again. The woman was still there, still gazing at him. Her eyes never seemed to move off him; they were like two bits of lit coal burning away steadily in her face.

Suddenly his panic overwhelmed him and he shouted aloud in the empty room, demanding to know what the hell she was staring at. Then he quietened down. There was no need to ask that. She was staring at him, of course. She was watching him. That was her job. She had been placed there to watch him, to see that he did not leave this house.

Slowly and insidiously the idea grew in him. This was Shemus Sullivan's doing. Shemus Sullivan was playing the traitor. All his whiskey and hospitality was just the bait in the trap. Even now the skunk was on his way to turn informer to reap a rich reward for landing Laggan Boyne in the death house. And he had left this woman to watch his prey, to see that he did not escape, to have him followed if he attempted to leave the house.

Boyne turned suddenly and pounded away from the window again, to search the house feverishly for some tangible proof of Sullivan's perfidy. He ransacked drawers and cupboards, throwing their contents to right and left in his frenzy. But he found nothing—nothing, that is, except another bottle of whiskey.

He uncorked the bottle and drank deeply from it, trying to drown his fears. But his fears rose above it and floated on top. His fear floated on top of his brain and behind his eyes, and all the time those other eyes watched him

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from the window over the way. Those black steady hells of eyes burned into his when he looked out, and burned into the back of his head when he didn't look out. He could feel them—searing.

Once he went to draw the curtains, but his hands got stuck in a mud of paralysis. He couldn't draw the curtains and then not know what she was doing. That would be a worse hell than the one he was in. No, he must see her, even as she saw him.

Through the long hours of the day he kept walking back and forward, to the window and away from the window, and all the time the eyes were there, the eyes were watching him.

He ate no food. The fire went out and he did not light it again.

When the cold shadows of night began to creep into the room he put on his greasy old coat and gathered it close round his neck. Even then the sweat ran down his face, the clammy rivers of sweat.

He went to the window again when the dusk was crowding in, and still he saw her eyes watching through it. They seemed to glow steadily through the twilight. Then his hand went into his pocket and he felt the knife. He found a strange calm comfort in the feel of the knife.

Suddenly Laggan Boyne straightened up and left the room. He left the house too. His fear had gone, and the knife was no longer in his pocket. It was in his hand.

Next morning the police came with a car and arrested Laggan Boyne and took him away. They did that because they had followed his footprints in the new snow—across the street and back again.

Later on, when they called Shemus Sullivan in to question him, he denied any knowledge of Laggan Boyne, and said he must be some tramp who had broken into his house while he had been away to the city on his private business as a stamp collector. That had been the plan, too, but Laggan Boyne had forgotten it.

But the worst thing of all that Laggan Boyne had to endure was that when he tried to plead guilty in a great rolling voice to the assassination of Padraic Kelman, nobody would believe him.

Even the men he had commanded in the Old Party would not believe that. They said that the man who killed Padraic Kelman was not the kind of man who would murder a poor old widow woman for what he could lay his thieving fingers on, and leave her stone-dead itself, lying over her book of Braille.

With all of which Shemus Sullivan and the Old Party agreed. For that was in the new plan.

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a new story by

HUGH PENTECOST

Know Your People

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: HUGH PENTECOST

TITLE: *Know Your People*

TYPE: International Intrigue

LOCALE: In the Andes Mountains

TIME: Today

COMMENTS: *High above the Amazon, in a secret airfield, the enemy attacked — and for a few minutes the fate of the free world depended on old General "Windy" Landis . . .*

UPON THE ENTRANCE OF THE VERY crisp and lovely-to-look-at Miss Jones, the General put the pot-bellied pipe he smoked from dawn to dark into the pocket of his white linen suit. But when Mr. Smith, coming in on the heels of Miss Jones, produced an automatic and pointed it at him, the General evidently decided this was not a moment for manners. He took the pipe out of his pocket, lit it with the gasoline torch he used for a lighter, and said, "What's this?"

The man who called himself Smith nodded at Steve McElroy and said, "Tell him."

McElroy's mouth was dry as cotton—bitter-tasting cotton. What he had to tell the General—old Windy Landis, as he was known both to his intimates and his detractors—was that their world was coming to an abrupt end in less than an hour.

What was supposedly a secret known only to McElroy and General Landis was now, disastrously, shared by Mr. Smith and Miss Jones and the man who sat in the General's best armchair with a submachine gun cradled on his knees — the man who called himself Brown. A few hours ago an army bomber had taken off from an airbase in Florida on what was apparently a routine training flight. The takeoff from Florida had been most casual, with only enough gas

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for a few hours of maneuvering over the Caribbean. Actually, aboard that bomber was the very latest and most top secret of America's nuclear weapons, headed for installation at one of our NATO defense bases in Europe.

The secrecy had been elaborate. The bomber was really headed for Landis Field, high on a plateau in the Andes, hewn out of the jungle two days march to the great yellow Amazon River. Here the bomber was to refuel for its transoceanic flight.

But Smith, Jones, Brown & Company had somehow penetrated the secret. They had arrived at Landis Field a short time ago with credentials to show that they were Security officers. In ten minutes McElroy, the field manager, was their prisoner. Key personnel, like Madigan the radio-telephone operator, turned out to be defective—planted by Smith, Jones, Brown & Company some months before. When the bomber arrived at Landis Field in less than an hour it would be efficiently hijacked by Smith, Jones, Brown & Company, and one of our most important weapons secrets would be in the hands of the enemy.

McElroy had to tell the General that the wool had been very cleverly pulled over their eyes. They had not been surprised when keymen at Landis Field had been offered better jobs in the recent past. McElroy had hired new men—Madigan, for one—and every single one of them had been agents for Smith, Jones, Brown & Company. Without the use of the radio telephone, and without access to a plane on the field—all of which were now guarded by other men with submachine guns—there was no way to make contact with the outside world. The army bomber with its precious secret would fly in blissful ignorance to her rendezvous with enemy hijackers.

If there was one thing which, absurdly, McElroy dreaded, it was to hear General Windy Landis say, "I told you so!" The old man listened, nodding, puffing foul clouds of smoke from his pipe. "That radio operator," he said. "What's his name—Madigan? He's one of the planted men?"

McElroy nodded grimly. The day Madigan had arrived at Landis Field, the General had said, "Don't like the looks of that fellow. Have a feeling about him."

He said it again now. "Never liked that fellow's looks. Had a feeling about him."

The taste in McElroy's mouth grew more bitter.

Seven years ago he had taken over the management of Landis Field. "You'll have to put up with old Windy Landis," the executive vice-president of the company had told him. "Sort of landmark—a legend, you might say. Built the field thirty years ago, you know. Doesn't want to leave. It's his world—his whole world. So humor him."

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McElroy had humored him. Every morning the General drove down from his house at the top of the hill overlooking the field in his little red jeep, as if he were coming to review his troops. Every morning for seven years he had said to McElroy, "Everything shipshape?" Every morning for seven years McElroy had assured him that everything was shipshape. Then came the brief lecture period.

"Working in a strange country," the General had said, every morning for seven years, "you have to know your people. If you know your people you're safe."

Then came the daily anecdote. "By the way, McElroy, did I ever tell you about the time I—?" And the General would be off on one of his long, usually pointless, and always excruciatingly dull anecdotes.

There was one more thing McElroy had to tell the General now. "After the plane has been hijacked, General," he said in a flat voice, "our friends here will point out to the world, through their efficient propaganda, that you and I, the only personnel at the Field who knew the secret of the bomber's mission, sold out! It will become generally believed that you, a famous American patriot, betrayed his government—with my help, of course."

The General nodded, apparently unmoved by anger or fear. His bushy white eyebrows were drawn together in an expression of intense concentration. His old blue eyes were unnaturally bright.

"Can't find a hole in it," he said. "Brilliantly planned and brilliantly executed. My congratulations."

"Thanks, buster," the man called Brown said, caressing his submachine gun.

The General continued to nod. "Really excellent," he said. "And accusing us! The big lie—oh, it didn't originate with Hitler. Strongest weapon there is—stronger than your rockets, or your satellites, or what-have-you. Always said so. And you know your people. Prime requirement. You know 'em here—placed them here yourselves. Hitler's greatest fault—didn't really know his people. Didn't know the British. Didn't know the Russians. If he had, he'd have won the war."

Abruptly the General reached for a little silver bell on the center table and rang it. The man Brown was out of his chair as if propelled by a coiled spring.

"What's that?"

"My dear fellow—just summoning the Indio woman in my kitchen," the General said. "A drink would seem to be in order. Toast to a brilliant campaign."

Teresa, the old Indio woman who had been the General's house servant for twenty years, came into the room, her wrinkled face expressionless.

"Whiskey," the General said. He made a gesture with his hands as if they were two pieces of bread.

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"Sandwiches—ham—bit of cheese."

Teresa nodded and disappeared. The old fool, McElroy thought; he still talks to her as if she were illiterate—in sign language. There had been schools for the Indios at Landis Field for thirty years, founded by the General himself. But the General had talked to her in signs and simple words thirty years ago, and he still talked to her that way. Know your people, my foot!

"Did I ever tell you about the time I captured a German general and his whole staff in the African fighting, McElroy? It was in '42—yes, the spring of '42—"

And so the general went on with the story of how he and the captive German general had discussed the campaign in detail over drinks, and how the two of them had got plastered together.

"Ah, whiskey!" the General said, as Teresa appeared with a well stocked tray.

While the General poured "small libations" for Smith, Jones, Brown & Company, McElroy went hopelessly over old ground. No way to get to the radio telephone. No way to get a plane out of one of the hangers. Even if, by some miracle, he could make a break from this cottage and escape Mr. Brown's deadly weapon, others would be waiting for him at the Field. Even if he could break away into the jungle it was a two-day trek to the great yellow Mother River. And even if one of the floating chicken-coops that navigated the Amazon was there to meet him, it would be four more tortuous days downstream before he could arrive at any means of communication. By then the army bomber would have long since reached enemy territory, and enemy scientists would have discovered the secrets of the new weapon.

The General droned on. There was the First World War to cover, McElroy thought. Somewhere through the fog of despair the General's voice reached him. He was, by now, back here in the jungle.

"Came here thirty years ago," he was saying to a deadpan Mr. Smith. "Sent out by men who didn't know the terrain—didn't know the people. You've got to know your people. They dreamed of the jungle—those fellows. Of mine shafts, oil derricks, sawmills, and roads. And riches. But no way to get them out. An airfield, high in the mountains, was their answer. 'Find a location and build a field,' they told me. 'Mine not to reason why, mine but to do or die.'" The General chuckled. "*Charge of the Light Brigade,*" he said. "Well! I had equipment. I had guns and ammunition. But I was alone—with a lot of inaccurate aerial maps. Lost. Malaria. Worse than that—I was caught between two warring Indio tribes." He paused to relight his pipe and looked around the room cheerfully.

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"Shall we call them Tribe A and Tribe B?"

"Oh, by all means," Mr. Brown said, winking at Mr. Smith and Miss Jones. "Let us call them Tribe A and Tribe B."

"Good," the General said. "Well! Tribe B was in flight, pursued by Tribe A. I was in the middle. Tribe B was fleeing because its leader had been stabbed in the back on the way to a peace parley with Tribe A. Leader was a kind of god to the Indios. Without him they were lost. Tribe B in flight—me in the path—Tribe A hot on their heels. Tribe B unconcerned about me in their despair. Tribe A another affair entirely. I thought I was for the pot."

"The pot?" asked Brown, who seemed to be listening to the interminable tale.

"The stew pot," the General said, beaming at Mr. Brown. "Joke, of course. I don't think they ever ate human flesh."

"Lucky for you," Mr. Brown remarked.

"Been tough," the General chortled. "Uncommonly tough. Had to think of my skin in any event. I had guns and ammunition. I rallied Tribe B. To make a long story short, we put Tribe A to rout. I became the Great White Father to Tribe B. Wonderful luck. Suddenly I had guides, I had labor. Found and built Landis Field. Knew my people, you see."

"Quite a story," Mr. Brown said drily.

The General tamped down fresh tobacco in his pipe and lit up again. "Which brings me back to the big lie as a technique. Best of all weapons. Believe I said that before."

"You did," Mr. Brown said.

"Didn't tell you how I used it myself, though," the General said, an expression of cunning creeping into his old blue eyes. "Never even told *you* that, McElroy."

"I don't believe you did," McElroy said grimly.

"Know I didn't. Never told anyone before. But with things the way they are—Well! Landis Field is here because I rallied Tribe B, as I told you. Oh, treated them well afterwards. Schools. Clinics. Even a chapel! But it was all based on a big lie, gentlemen—and Miss Jones. A big thundering lie." He looked shrewdly at Mr. Brown. "Tribe B was in trouble because their leader had been treacherously killed on the way to a peace parley. I told you that."

"So you did."

"What I didn't tell you was this." The General beamed at his audience. "I killed him!" he said. "I killed him in cold blood! Had to. Had to make friends for myself somehow. How could I make friends? By saving them from defeat. But I couldn't save them unless they were leaderless. So I killed their chief. Had to. Whole thing built on a lie. But worthwhile, I think. End justifies the means, you know."

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McElroy stared at him in shocked surprise. Not only an old windbag, he told himself, bitterly, but a pious fraud and a cold-blooded murderer. The great General Landis!

"You see," the General was saying, "why I have no particular malice for you, Mr. Smith. It's the way the dice fall. That time I won. This time I lose. Mine was a brilliant campaign. Yours is a brilliant campaign. Here! We seem to be out of whiskey." He picked up the little silver bell and rang it again. This time Teresa didn't appear at once. After a moment or two the General rang the bell again.

"Fool woman!" he said. "Would you mind, McElroy? You'll find a fresh bottle in the closet to the right of the sink."

"I'll get it," Mr. Smith said sharply.

Miss Jones, who had been over at the picture window looking down at the concrete runways of Landis Field, came back across the room. "All quiet down there," she reported, almost gaily.

The General beamed at her. "Women," he said. "Always dangerous enemies. Had several run-ins with them in my time. Did I ever tell you, McElroy, about the time I—?"

McElroy lowered his aching head, trying to shut out the endless rumble of the General's voice. He went over and over the possibilities in his mind. But there were no possibilities. The trap was sealed.

Then, suddenly, the General's voice was interrupted by the sound of a massive shattering of glass. The picture window was smashed to bits. A spear had crashed through and was now stuck in the heavy plank flooring, its shaft quivering. Mr. Brown was on his feet. Mr. Smith had whirled to the door. Miss Jones stood transfixed.

"What the hell—!"

"Indios!" Brown said. He turned on the General. "What kind of gag is this?"

"Stumps me!" the General said. "Unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Well. If old Teresa heard me telling the truth about their leader—thirty years ago. Indios never forgive treachery. Even after thirty years—"

"We've got to get out of here," Miss Jones cried out suddenly. "If we can get down to the field in that jeep—"

They didn't wait—Smith, Jones, Brown & Company. They ran out the front door onto the patio. McElroy heard Brown shout, "There—in the bushes—" His submachine gun chattered, and then there was a loud salvo of gunfire, and a woman screamed. Then silence.

McElroy turned to the General. Quite placidly the old man was stuffing his pipe once more with the foul black shag he smoked. He

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looked at McElroy and there was pain in his blue eyes.

"One thing I'd like you to know, McElroy. There wasn't a word of truth in that story I told them."

"Story?"

"I didn't kill their chief. All a lie. A big lie. Potent weapon though. Indios'll probably wipe out every white man in the place. But—a stalemate is better than a defeat. We couldn't let them hijack that plane, could we?"

"You mean, sir, you deliberately—"

"Couldn't see any other way. Could you?"

"No, sir," McElroy said, his voice unsteady.

The General drew a deep breath. "Well, we're in for it. Personally I prefer to walk out and meet it rather than to wait for it in here." And then the General made one of the only really funny jokes McElroy could remember. He gave a short little bow from the waist and said, "Shall we dance, Mr. McElroy?"

The General squared his shoulders and they walked out onto the patio. The bodies of Smith, Jones, Brown & Company lay awkward in death. There was an unearthly silence in the woods surrounding the house. McElroy glanced at the General and saw a nerve twitch in his cheek. Then the General shouted at the top of his lungs.

"Come on! Come on! Get it over with!"

This old man, whom McElroy had thought of as completely insensitive, did have nerves which until that moment had been under iron control.

There was only silence.

Suddenly the blood began to rush through McElroy's veins, to pound in his ears. He turned and ran back into the house. He picked up the phone which connected with the radio-telephone switchboard in the Administration Building. A voice answered—a soft voice with a faint lisp to it.

"Switchboard operator."

It wasn't the treacherous Madigan.

"Who is this?"

"Eustasio, Mr. McElroy."

One of the best of the Indios—one who had been to the University in Rio.

"Where is Madigan, Eustasio?"

"Mr. Madigan is unable to come to the phone, Mr. McElroy. But the field is in our hands, sir, and we wait for orders from the General—and you, Mr. McElroy."

McElroy's head was spinning. "But the General is waiting outside for you to—to—"

Eustasio chuckled softly. "The General is like most parents, Mr. McElroy. He doesn't realize when his children have grown up. For thirty years he has educated us to become adults. Teresa did not believe his story. We know him, Mr. McElroy—we know him well. Tell him so."

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McElroy walked unsteadily out onto the patio where General Windy Landis waited for death. An emotion he hadn't felt since he was a child overwhelmed McElroy as he went over to the old man and put his arms around his shoulders in a bear hug. "They didn't believe you, General. They're waiting for your orders."

The General harrumphed and twisted himself out of McElroy's embrace. "Well!" he said. "Well, well! Mustn't crack up now, must we? Things to do. Get ready for that plane. Due very soon."

"Yes, sir."

"Shall we go down to the Field in the jeep?"

"Yes, sir."

The old man hesitated. "Didn't believe me, eh? That's gratifying, you know, McElroy. Very gratifying."

"Yes, sir. They know their people—you specifically, sir."

"Yes. Well! McElroy, did I ever tell you about the time I—"

"No, sir," McElroy interrupted. "But I'd very much like to hear it."

The General's head swiveled around and there was the mildest suspicion in his blue eyes. "Well," he said. "Well, well!" He ignited his pipe with the gasoline torch and blew out a great cloud of smoke. "It was in Tunisia, June of '42—no, July I think—yes, it was July of '42. Well—"

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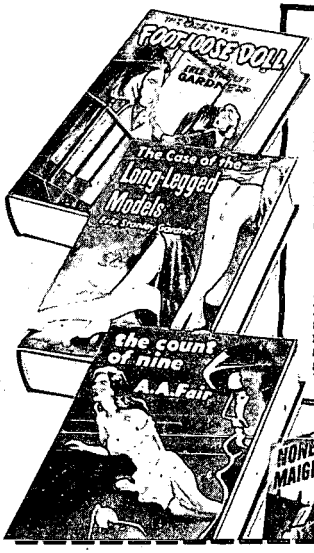

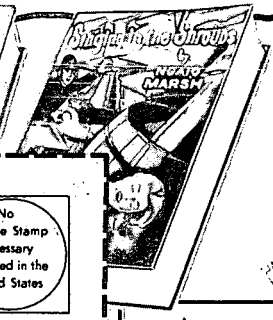

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